Jesus, Muhammad and the Goddess

a Girl God Anthology

Edited by Trista Hendren, Pat Daly and Noor-un-nisa Gretasdottir

Jesus, Muhammad and the Goddess

35 International contributors reflect on finding Goddess within (and without) Christianity and Islam.

"How did we go from a place where women were honored and respected and rape was inconceivable, to a place where women are treated as little more than intelligent animals to be used and tossed away?" -Liona Rowan

"Why would God create half of humanity only to be subjugated, and then give that oppressed half the divine spark in our wombs?" -Tamara Albanna

"My father was not love, so how could I even think of the male deity and its offshoots: Lord, King...Kingdom...? How can the triune God be in community with nothing but men or masculine archetypes?" -Bonnie Odiorne, PhD

"Can You Kill the Spirit? What Happened to Female Imagery for God in Christian Worship?" -Carol P. Christ, PhD

"Why do I need Jesus to mediate what conversations I have with God? How is it reasonable to posit that those who do not profess a belief in him are condemned to hell? Explain how God is a three-personed deity who imposes a set of rules we are to follow but who also sets certain biological instincts in opposition to those rules? And what the hell is all this business about God creating man, but man creating woman?" -Dominique Christina

"By altering tradition - and amending the translation from the (now) traditional "He" to "She" - does the collective consciousness of the Ummah shift? Do we authentically reclaim The Divine Feminine inside Allah that was acknowledged 1400 years ago?" -Shahla Khan Salter

"When was the last time we experienced true prophecy? The last prophets gave us patriarchy. Since then, our connection to the divine has seemingly ceased while mainstream religion continues to regurgitate the old destructive message. Simultaneously, current low rates of church attendance attest to the irrelevance of that message. We clearly need a new message." -Mary Petiet

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Girl God Books

Just as I Am: Hymns Affirming the Divine Female
What is a Hermnal? It's the collective sigh of our ancestral Grandmothers. It's a means of drawing us closer together as Sisters. It is a compilation of songs that affirms our Sacredness, apart from Man, and assures us that we are Sovereign Beings and Creatrixes, too. And it is our Love Gift of Gratitude to Mama.

On the Wings of Isis: Reclaiming the Sovereignty of Auset
For centuries, women have lived, fought and died for their equality, independence and sovereignty. Originally known as Auset, the Egyptian Goddess Isis reveals such a path. Unfurl your wings and join an array of strong women who have embodied the Goddess of Ten Thousand Names to celebrate their authentic selves

Original Resistance: Reclaiming Lilith, Reclaiming Ourselves
There is, perhaps, no more powerful archetype of female resistance than Lilith. As women across the globe rise up against the patriarchy, Lilith stands beside them, misogyny's original challenger. This anthology—a chorus of voices hitting chords of defiance, liberation, anger and joy—reclaims the goodness of women bold enough to hold tight to their essence. Through poetry, prose, incantation, prayer and imagery, women from all walks of life invite you to join them in the revolutionary act of claiming their place—of reclaiming themselves.

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Inanna's Ascent examines how females can rise from the underworld and reclaim their power, sovereignly expressed through poetry, prose and visual art.

Re-visioning Medusa: from Monster to Divine Wisdom
A remarkable collection of essays, poems, and art by scholars who have researched Her, artists who have envisioned Her, and women who have known Her in their personal story. All have spoken with Her and share something of their communion in this anthology.

How to Live Well Despite Capitalist Patriarchy
A book challenging societal assumptions to help women become stronger and break free of their chains.

New Love: a reprogramming toolbox for undoing the knots
A powerful combination of emotional/spiritual techniques, art and inspiring words for women who wish to move away from patriarchal thought. *New Love* includes a mixture of compelling thoughts and suggestions for each day, along with a "toolbox" to help you change the parts of your life you want to heal.

The Crone Initiation*: Women Speak* on the Menopause Journey
The Crone Initiation is an anthology of women's experiences of perimenopause and menopause, and the part Goddess plays in this journey. Crone's presence in the breakdowns and breakthroughs, the disintegration and rebuilding, is expressed through words and art. Meaning is reclaimed and the power of the Elder restored.

Mentorship with Goddess: Growing Sacred Womanhood
A Sacred Woman reclaims herself as Goddess – a unique strand, frequency and incarnation of her – essential for the completion and wholeness of the spectrum of the collective Feminine. Our bodies are the gateway to recalling this truth. Mentorship with Goddess is a workbook – a year-long curriculum and programme – a rite of passage – especially useful for the transition into autonomous adulthood – the process of individuation - and then also for the menopause journey.

The Girl God
A book for children young and old, celebrating the Divine Female by Trista Hendren. Magically illustrated by Elisabeth Slettnes with quotes from various faith traditions and feminist thinkers.

Complete list of Girl God publications at thegirlgod.com

For Patricia Lee,
Else Marie,
and
Um Husni:
the mothers
and grandmothers
of Goddesses
for generations on end.

And,
for Candace.
May you
finally
rest in peace.
And may your children
and grandchildren
reside in that peace.

"...exclusive male imagery of the Divine not only instilled an imbalance within human consciousness, it legitimized patriarchal power in the culture at large. Here alone is enough reason to recover the Divine Feminine, for there is a real and undeniable connection between the repression of the feminine in our deity and the repression of women."

-Sue Monk Kidd

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Then
will language be reborn
with an open heart?
East listening. The changes to be made
are the hammer and the anvil
but I didn't
know this poem would end.

The 99 Names: Allah is not He or She

Dr. Amina Wadud

THE QUR'AN SAYS: "to Allah belongs the most beautiful names al-Asmaa' al-Husnaa', so call upon Her with these." Someone asked me why I used 'She' with Allah so here is my chance to explain. First of all, we should all note that using the word 'She' invokes a question. Meanwhile, why is there *no* question when I use 'He'? Because I use that too.

I intentionally use all three pronouns available in English; Arabic has just two. This was easiest of all to explain to Indonesians, because *bahasa* has only one pronoun. It is clear to me that a pronoun is only a *function* of language. It does not convey or express gender politics. The trouble is, of course, when we choose one pronoun of the English three, some people take it literally; use the 'She' word and we think it is because I mean that Allah is female. I don't believe God/Allah is female. On the contrary, I think God transcends gender. So, the only way to remind myself (and others) of this is to use *all* of the English pronouns; but especially to use 'She'. It became clear that we are so comfortable with using 'He' with Allah that we slip into thinking Allah is male, a literal 'He.'

If we take 'He' unquestionably, then we should be able to take 'She' equally unquestionably—but we don't. That's why we need to use 'She' more often. I use 'It' too, but not as often as the other two because we have all three pronouns in English. A pronoun is a certain kind of marker in language, *not* the essence of the divine. But I have other reasons too.

Arabic-speaking people take the gender of "things" literally: they start giving social or anthropological characteristics to inanimate objects. The table is feminine and they start making a social analysis of why it is feminine. Oddly enough, in Arabic, the sun is feminine, and the moon is masculine. Think about

that for a minute. We tend to think in opposite gender terms about the sun and the moon in English. But it is *not* literal; it's a metaphor.

It's true the Qur'an only uses the Arabic masculine (singular) pronoun and not the feminine. But that's not literal either. You know how I know? the Qur'an uses the first-person singular, 'I' and 'Me' for Allah, and also uses the first-person plural, 'We' and 'Us'. However, no one *ever* takes that literally, proposing that Allah is more than one! In fact, they make excuses for this occurrence in the sacred text. They give reasons for not taking it literally ("It's the *royal* we"). However, you can't imagine how many people get literal about the pronoun 'He'—they get crazy about it.

Another reason is when the Qur'an says *laysa ka mithlihi shay'un*: "there is *no* thing like Him." This, and where it also says *wa min kulli shay'un khalaqnaa zawjayn*: "(from) *all* things We have created (in) pairs." Thus, pairedness is a characteristic of that which is created. Here the word *shay'* means "created thing or the thing-ness of creation." But Allah is *not* created and does not share in this paired reality; either by the dualism of it or even by being one part of a pair, implying the relationship of being in opposition. This is *not* a characteristic of the Creator. In other places, the Qur'an clarifies the (human) pairs as male and female: "'We' created 'You' (humans) from (or of) male and female." Pretty straightforward if you think about it. But since we as human beings have been affected by patriarchy, then we reflect that onto God / Allah. The divine cannot have gender.

Now, Allah does have a lot of characteristics—according to traditions, 99 in fact. These are what the Qur'an refers to as *al-Asmaa' al-Husnaa'*, the most beautiful names. These are *not* like 99 different gods. These are descriptions or characteristics of The One God. God has all of these 99 attributes (and more, actually) simultaneous with Himself as unified (or *tawhid*).

Some of these characteristics (or *sifaat*) are literally opposites of others. For example, God is both Wrathful and Merciful; both a Punisher and a Forgiver.

These mutually existing attributes or characteristics can be easily clustered into two main groups: those known as *Jalal* and those known as *Jamal*. This is like the yin and yang of the names. *Jalal* refers to those characteristics of Allah's God-ness or *uluhiyyah*. The other characteristics, the *Jamal* ones, are with reference to Allah's *rububiyyah* or (nurturing) Lordship. Attributes like Creator, Raiser from the Dead, Ultimate Judge, and Master of the Universe are clearly God-like, exclusive. Attributes like Merciful, Compassionate, and Loving, are relational, Lordly. In fact, we humans can possess these *Jamal* attributes in the form of virtues, where Allah has them in the form of essence.

Recently some superheroes were created using the 99 names, known as The Super 99. While I want to applaud the possibility of infusion of all dimensions of all cultures with things that remind us of the divine, here's the thing: I have noticed that we have a tendency to defer mostly or sometimes only to these powerful, or masculine, yang attributes. This has consequences on us culturally. There is an overemphasis on these traits that runs right alongside our tendency toward patriarchy. Patriarchy is a kind of *istikbar*, with one gender, male, considered better than the other, female. Plus, when one has the power to assert this sense of different values because of different genders, it turns into *zulm*, or oppression.

I keep thinking about ways to move out of gender oppression. So, it occurred to me that we could resume the harmonious balance in creation by shifting our emphasis onto the *Jamal* names, the yin or feminine aspects of the divine. Clearly, we need more mercy, compassion, forgiveness and love. This is not a question of either/or: All these belong equally to Allah. It's just a question of emphasis in our everyday, ordinary circumstances.

It's fairly self-evident that the idea of the beauty in Allah and Allah's names really should incline us toward the *Jamal* names, since the word *Jamal* also means beauty. We need more of this divine beauty in our world. We are the agents of this. As Ghandi said, we must be the change we want to see in the world, and I want to see more compassion and beauty. What better inspiration than that which is already available to us in the form of 99 beautiful names?

Originally published in *Religion Dispatches*.

The Sisterhood of the Misunderstood Jesus

Monette Chilson

SISTERS, for far too long you have been preached to about a God who is called Father, but never Mother. About a Jesus who called men, but not women, as his disciples. You have taken these words, spoken as if they were from holy stations, into your hearts. They have shaped you and just may have kept you from fully living God's grand and glorious plan for you.

Torrents of divinity, filtered through patriarchal dogma and doctrine, now only a trickle. Barely enough to quench your soul, parched as it is, longing to swim in the living water of a God that is equal parts Goddess.

But from the beginning, a golden thread of sisterhood existed. Yes, even before Eve, whose story has been twisted and told in ways that shame women still today. There is so much more to your story. To your spiritual heritage. Let us start at the beginning.

Sophia

In Sophia, the first bearer of this golden thread, our story is born. In Proverbs she tells us:

> *I was there when the Almighty created the heavens,*
> *and set the horizon just above,*
> *set the clouds in the sky,*
> *and established the springs of the deep,*
> *gave the seas their boundaries*
> *and set their limits at the shoreline.*
> *When the foundation of the earth was laid out,*
> *I was the skilled artisan standing next to the Almighty.*

Now, now...those days are over. Listen closely.
Life speaks inside our veins.
Hail Shekhinah, Sophia, Hikmat, Maria!
Hail Eternal Spirit, Breath, Wisdom, Mother!
When the Lady of Light breathed Eve
into Adam, Love came to Life.
And when Adam buried Eve,
only Adam died.

And Her Word is Light, Breath, Love, Spirit, Wisdom.
She says: I breathe into your brother's body,
the Mercy he needs to feel Me within him.
I haven't forgotten, no.
Yet amazed by Grace, even sin is dhikr.
The way of revenge only builds
a shadow between the creation and True Love again.
Echo each Word I speak; it re-members you all, My One Within.

Note from the Author:

Allaht isn't related to the Islamic God. S/He is more like Shiva/Shakti, both necessary for Creation and Consciousness to exist on all levels.

Bricks of clay is the definition of Adam void of Eve or Shiva void of Shakti. Biblical names typically represent an aspect of the person.

Adamah in Hebrew means earth, (also related to word red). Eve or Hawwah means "living one" or "source of life" and is related to the word "haya" to live. When we look at the Creation story through the meanings of the Names vs. a literal reading of their story, Eve is the Source of Life and Being.

Dhikr means divine remembrance in Arabic.
"La ilaha ill Allah" for a Sufi means "There is not reality but Divine Reality." For me, as a Universal Sufi, the Truth appears in "La ilaha ill Allaht."

The Centrality of the Divine Feminine in Sufism

Laurence Galian

The Eternal Feminine
draws us heavenward.
—*Goethe*

THE WORLD-FAMOUS Islamic Sûfî poet Mevlana Jalaluddin Rūmī (1207-1273) writes: "Woman is the radiance of God; she is not your beloved. She is the Creator—you could say that she is not created."[39] This paper calls attention to an unexpected and little explored fact of immense significance in Islam: at the center of Islam abides the Divine Feminine.

Before the Prophet of Islam, Muhammad, brought the religion of Islam to Arabia, the Arabs were a polytheistic people. Hindu merchants frequently passed through Makkah, a major trading hub. Ancient Indian Vedic texts refer to Makkah as a place where *Alla* the Mother Goddess was worshiped. In Sanskrit, Alla means "mother." This name was connected to the Hindu Goddess Ila. She was the consort of the Hindu God Śiva in his form known as Il, and this form of Śiva was known and worshiped in pre-Islamic Makkah. A great deal of cultural and spiritual interchange took place between the merchants of Makkah and India.

According to some scholars however, the ancient Arabs believed that Allâh (the greatest God) had entrusted the discharge of the various functions of the universe to different (lesser) gods and goddesses. People would therefore turn to these gods and goddesses to invoke their blessings in all sorts of undertakings.[40] The ancient Arabs prayed to these lesser gods and goddesses to intercede before Allâh and to pass their

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[39] Rumi, Jalaluddin. The Mathnawi Jalaluddin Rumi. Trans. Reynold A. Nicholson. Gibb Memorial Trust, 2002 I:2437.

[40] Ali, Maulana Muhammad. *Muhammad the Prophet*. Lahore: 1924, p.

desires on to Allâh. As part of their religious practices, they visited Makkah. In Makkah was a large cube-like building known as the Ka'ba. This temple contained three hundred sixty idols. Those who were visiting the great city of Makkah as pilgrims would circumambulate the Ka'ba as part of their religious rites.[41]

The pre-Islamic Arabs had a custom of performing a sevenfold circumambulation of the Ka'ba completely naked. Men performed this in the daytime and women at night.

The door of the Ka'ba is in the northeastern wall. On the outside, in the corner east of the door and 1.5 meters above the ground, the famous "Black Stone" *(Hajar Al-Aswad)* is found. This Black Stone is now in pieces, three large parts, and smaller fragments, which are tied together with a silver band. The eminently feminine *yoni*[42] form of the Black Stone's setting is remarkable. There are several theories on the origin of the Black Stone: a meteor, lava, or basalt. Its color is reddish black, with some red and yellow particles. Its original diameter is estimated to have been 30 cm. The identity of the Black Stone with the Great Goddess and with the moon is recognized by the *Hulama* – the rationalist school of Islam.[43]

Inside the Ka'ba there were fresco paintings including those of Abraham and the "Virgin Mary" with the baby Jesus.[44] When Muhammad retook Makkah, he began a program of removing the pagan influences from the Ka'ba, the most holy of Muslim

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41 Syed, G. M. "Religion and Reality." G. M. Syed Institute of Social Sciences Sindh (1986). http://sindhlink.net/saeen/religion/saeen-book2-chap4.htm

42 A Tantric term for vagina.

43 Briffault, R. *The Mothers: A Study of the Origins of Sentiments and Institutions* (3 Volumes). London: George Allen & Unwin LTD, 1952.

44 "Fatimah, Mary and the Divine Feminine in Islam" *Knowledge of Reality Magazine.* http://www.sol.com.au/kor/22_02.htm (1996-2003).

sites. He removed many frescoes and images that he considered inauspicious, but he specifically left on the walls a fresco of the "Virgin Mary" and her child. The *Qur'ān* obligates every believer to make a pilgrimage to Makkah at least once in his or her lifetime, if finances permit.[45] Since the time of Muhammad, during the *Tawaf* (circumambulation of the Ka'ba)[46] pilgrims kiss or touch the black stone as they make circuit around the Ka'ba.

Ben-Jochannan who has studied the polytheistic religions of the Arabian Peninsula points out that before Muhammad, Makkah was a holy site to the worshippers of El'Ka'ba (a goddess). Her worshippers knelt at her symbol, a jet-black stone.[47] This jet-black stone was probably a meteorite, and the *Hajar Al-Aswad* was once known as the 'Old Woman.'[48] Popular tradition relates how Abraham, when he founded the Ka'ba, bought the land from an old woman to which it belonged. She however consented to part with it only on the condition that she and her descendants should have the key to the place in their keeping.[49] Today the stone is served by men called *Beni Shaybah* (the Sons of the Old Woman).

The crescent moon goddess (and virgin warrior Goddess of the morning star), Al-Uzza, was known to the pre-Islamic Arabs as "The Mighty." Some scholars believe that in very ancient times, it was she who was considered enshrined in the black stone of Makkah, where she was served by priestesses. Her sacred grove of acacia trees once stood just south of Makkah,

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[45] Qur'an. Sura 22:26-37.

[46] "The Black Stone: Dark Matter" http://www.crystalinks.com/blackstone.html

[47] Ben-Jochannan, Yosef A.A. *African Origins of Major "Western Religions"*. Black Classic Press, 1991.
Jackson, John G. *Man, God and Civilization*. Replica Books; Reprint edition, 2000.

[48] Taylor, Robert. "The Black Stone: The Nightside Tarot" http://homepage.sunrise.ch/homepage/prkoenig/taylor1.htm

[49] Briffault, R. *The Mothers: A Study of the Origins of Sentiments and Institutions* (3 Volumes). London: George Allen & Unwin LTD, 1952.

at Nakla. The Acacia tree was sacred to the Arabs who made the idol of Al-Uzza from its wood.[50]

Stones, similar to the black stone of the Ka'ba, were worshipped by Arabs in most parts and by the Semitic races generally. The Kabyles of Kabylia in Northern Algeria say their first Great Mother goddess was turned to stone. Other names of the goddess are Kububa, Kuba, Kube and the Latin Cybele.[51] Other scholars say that this meteorite was brought to Makkah by the Sabeans or the Ethiopians and state that the goddess who dwelt in the sacred black stone was given the title *Shayba* (see *Beni Shaybah* – the Sons of the Old Woman, above) who represented the Moon in its threefold existence – waxing, (maiden), full (pregnant mother) and waning (old wise woman).[52] Although the word *Ka'ba* itself means 'cube', it is very close to the word *ku'b* meaning 'woman's breast'.[53]

Sûfism cherishes the esoteric secret of woman, even though Sûfism is the esoteric aspect of a seemingly patriarchal religion. Muslims pray five times a day facing the city of Makkah. Inside every Mosque is a niche, or recess, called the *Mihrab* – a vertical rectangle curved at the top that points toward the direction of Makkah. The Sûfis know the *Mihrab* to be a visual symbol of an abstract concept: the transcendent vagina of the female aspect of divinity. In Sûfism, woman is the

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[50] "The Acacia Tree and the Rites of Initiation" http://www.acacialand.com/prima.html

[51] Taylor, Robert. "The Black Stone: The Nightside Tarot" http://homepage.sunrise.ch/homepage/prkoenig/taylor1.htm

[52] "Ancient Abyssinia: Ancient Abyssinia: Saba" http://www.geocities.com/CollegePark/Classroom/9912/ancientabyssinia.html

[53] According to the Scofield Bible, the word Almighty is a translation of the Hebrew El Shaddai, one of the names applied to God in the Old Testament. El means the "Strong One," and shad means "the breast, invariably used in Scripture for a woman's breast. Shaddai therefore means primarily 'the breasted.' The Divine therefore is 'Shaddai' because She is the nourisher, the strength-giver, and so, in a secondary sense, the satisfier, who pours Herself into believing lives.

ultimate secret, for woman is the soul. Toshihiko Izutsu writes, "The wife of Adam was feminine, but the first soul from which Adam was born was also feminine."[54]

The Divine Feminine has always been present in Islam. This may be surprising to many people who see Islam as a patriarchal religion. Maybe the reason for this misconception is the very nature of the feminine in Islam. The Divine Feminine in Islam manifests metaphysically and in the inner expression of the religion. The Divine Feminine is not so much a secret within Islam as She is the compassionate Heart of Islam that enables us to know Divinity. Her centrality demonstrates her necessary and life-giving role in Islam.

Sûfism, or as some would define it "mystical Islam" has always honored the Divine Feminine. Of course, Allâh has both masculine and feminine qualities, but to the Sûfî, Allâh has always been the Beloved and the Sûfî has always been the Lover. The *Qur'ān*, referring to the final Day, perhaps divulges a portion of this teaching: "And there is manifest to them of God what they had not expected to see."[55]

Islam is aniconic. In other words, images, effigies, or idols of Allâh are not allowed, although verbal depiction abounds. There was a question long debated in Islam: can we see Allâh? The Prophet said in a *hadīth*, "In Paradise the faithful will see Allâh with the clarity with which you see the moon on the fourteenth night (the full moon)."

Theologians debated what this could mean, but the Sûfîs have held that you can see Allâh even in this world, through the "eye of the heart." The famous Sûfî martyr al-Hallaj said in a poem, *"ra'aytu rabbi bi-'ayni qalbî"* (I saw my Lord with the eye of my heart). Relevant to the focus of this paper is that Sûfîs have

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[54] Izutsu, Toshihiko. *The Key Philosophical Concepts in Sufism and Taoism – Ibn Arabî and Lao-Tzu*. Ghuang-Tzu: Tokyo 1966.

[55] Qur'an. Sura 39:47.

always described this theophanic experience as the vision of a woman, the female figure as the object of *ru'yah* (vision of Allâh).

There was a great Sûfî Saint who was born in 1165 C.E. Besides Shi'a Muslims, numberless Sunni Ulemas called him "The Greatest Sheikh" (al-Shaykh al-Akbar).[56] His name was Muyiddin ibn al-'Arabî. He said, "To know woman is to know oneself," and "Whoso knoweth his self, knoweth his Lord." Ibn al-'Arabî wrote a collection of poems entitled *The Tarjumân al-ashwâq*. These are love poems that he composed after meeting the learned and beautiful Persian woman Nizam in Makkah. The poems are filled with images pointing to the Divine Feminine. His book *Fusûs al-hikam,*[57] in the last chapter, relates that man's supreme witnessing of Allâh is in the form of the woman during the act of sexual union. He writes, "The contemplation of Allâh in woman is the highest form of contemplation possible: As the Divine Reality is inaccessible in respect of the Essence, and there is contemplation only in a substance, the contemplation of God in women is the most intense and the most perfect; and the union which is the most intense (in the sensible order, which serves as support for this contemplation) is the conjugal act." Allâh as the Beloved in Sûfî literature, the ma'shûq, is always depicted with female iconography.

The Da Vinci Code,[58] a thriller by Dan Brown, tells the story of a Harvard professor summoned to the Louvre Museum after a murder there to examine cryptic symbols relating to da Vinci's work. During the course of his investigation, he uncovers an ancient secret: the claim that Mary Magdalene represents the Divine Feminine, and that she and Jesus had a sexual

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[56] al-Misri, Ahmad ibn Naqib. *Reliance of the Traveller: A Classic Manual of Islamic Sacred Law* (Umdat al-salik). Trans. Shaykh Nuh Ha Mim Keller. Amana Publications, 1994.

[57] al-'Arabî, Ibn. *Wisdom of the Prophets* (Fusûs Al Hikam). Taj Publishers, 1994.

[58] Brown, Dan. *The Da Vinci Code*. Doubleday, 2003.

relationship. While the book is a work of fiction, it does represent the force of the Divine Feminine to unveil Herself in the midst of religious traditions that have become altered through cultural accretions into anti-sexual, anti-pleasure and anti-feminine belief structures. There is also the worthy of note nonfiction work *The Woman with the Alabaster Jar: Mary Magdalen and the Holy Grail* [59] which presents the idea that Mary Magdalen was actually married to Jesus Christ and the Holy Grail is not a cup or chalice at all but Mary's womb as she carried the "bloodline" of Jesus to Egypt and then to Europe. The author, Margaret Starbird,[60] advances her theory by analyzing art of the dark ages and the "understood" meaning behind it. Starbird does an excellent job of researching European history, heraldry, the rituals of Freemasonry, medieval art, symbolism, psychology, mythology, religion, and the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures to discover that the meaning of the Holy Grail could be the lost bride of Jesus and the female child she carried within her.

Starbird's theological beliefs were profoundly shaken when she read *Holy Blood, Holy Grail,*[61] a book that dared to suggest that Jesus Christ was married to Mary Magdalen and that their descendants carried on his holy bloodline in Western Europe. Shocked by such heresy, this Roman Catholic scholar set out to refute it, but instead found new and compelling evidence for the existence of the bride of Jesus. The roles of Muhammad's

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[59] Starbird, Margaret. *The Woman With the Alabaster Jar: Mary Magdalen and the Holy Grail*. Bear & Co., 1993.

[60] Margaret Starbird holds a master's degree in comparative literature from the University of Maryland and has studied at the Christian Albrechts University in Kiel, Germany, and at Vanderbilt Divinity School in Nashville.

[61] For those who feel that many of the assumptions drawn by the authors of *Holy Blood, Holy Grail* have been since disproved and believe the authors' sources are questionable, The Messianic Legacy also by Baigent explains more fully the information used to deduce the premises put forward in Holy Blood, Holy Grail. It is based on other published works by scholars and authorities on the interpretations of the Dead Sea Scrolls.

daughter Fātima and Mary are similar. The true line of the Prophet 'Īsā (Jesus) and his real teaching passing through Mary and into Europe mirrors the true line of the Imāms (who propagated the real teachings of the Prophet Muhammad) who issued from the womb of Fātima. Fātima is regarded by some Sûfîs and theologians as the first spiritual head *(qutb)* of the Sûfî fellowship.[62]

Among the Ghulat[63] there is much respect paid to the Divine Feminine. In the Ghulat group the Ahl-i-Haqq ("the People of Truth"), the Divine Feminine appears as the *Khātūn-i Qiyāmat* (Lady of Resurrection) who also is manifested as the mysterious angel Razbâr (also Ramzbâr or Remzebâr). The writer, Frédéric Macler, claims that the name Razbâr is of Arabic origin and means "secret of the creator."[64] The term *qiyāma* literally means, "rising" of the dead, and allegorically, it implies an idea denoting the rising to the next spiritual stage, and *qiyāmat-i qubra* (great resurrection) means an attainment of the highest degree when a man becomes free from the ties of external laws, whom he shackles and transfigures into spiritual substance, which rejoins its divine sources.[65] "The King of the World was sitting on the water with His four associate angels *(chahār malak-i muqarrab)* when they suddenly saw the Pure Substance of Hadrat-i Razbâr, the Khātūn-i Qiyāmat (Lady of the Resurrection). She brought out from the sea a round loaf of bread *(kulūcha)* and

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62 Goldziher, Ignaz. Muhammedanische Studien 2. Halle, 1989, p. 300; as cited in: *Women of Sufism: A Hidden Treasure: Writings and Stories of Mystic Poets, Scholars & Saints*. Selected and Introduced by Camille Adams Helminski. Boston: Shambhala, 2003.

63 The Ghulat being customarily judged Islamic (and usually Shī'a) extremists who go to extremes in exalting a person or persons to the extent of raising him or them above the ranks of ordinary human beings.

64 Adjarian, H. "Gyoran et Thoumaris." Translated into French by Frédéric Macler. Revue de L'Histoire des Religion 93, no. 3 (May – June 1926): 294-307.

65 "Qiyamat-i Qubra in Alamut"
F.I.E.L.D. First Ismaili Electronic Library and Database
http://ismaili.net/histoire/history06/history620.html

offered it to the King of the World. By His order they formed a devotional assembly (jam), distributed the bread, offered prayers, and exclaimed 'Hū!' Then the earth and the skies became fixed, the skies being that *kulūcha*."[66]

Another rendition of the emergence of the Lady of the Resurrection is as follows: "After this the Holder of the World and Creator of Man looked upon 'Azra'īl with the eye of benefaction, and 'Azra'īl became split into two parts, one exactly like the other, and from between these parts a drop of light emerged in the form of a loaf of *kulūcha* bread. The Creator then said, I appoint that person (sūrat) who became separated from 'Azra'īl to be the Lady of the Resurrection *(Khātūn-i Qiyāmat)*, who will on the Resurrection Day be the helper of human beings."[67]

The followers of Yârsânism, also known as the Yârisân, Aliullâhi, Ali-llâhi (i.e., "those who deify 'Alī"), Alihaq, Ahl-i Haqq ("the People of Truth") or Ahl-i Haq ("the People of the Spirit" *(Hâk or Haqj)*, are concentrated in southern Kurdistan in both Iran and Iraq. In each epoch there is a female avatar of the Universal Spirit, a reflection of the higher status of women in the Kurdish culture and tradition.[68]

What do those who study mystical Islam claim is the hidden meaning regarding the existence of the sexes in creation? These researchers perceive that the biological and psychological differences between the sexes are only hints of a

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[66] Tadhkira'i A'lā, (Ahl-i Haqq Creation Story) as found in "The Truth-Worshippers of Kurdistan: Ahl-i Haqq Texts" edited in the original Persian and analyzed by W. Ivanow, Leiden, Holland: E. J. Brill, 1953.

[67] Tadhkira'i A'lā, (Ahl-i Haqq Creation Story) as found in "The Truth-Worshippers of Kurdistan: Ahl-i Haqq Texts" edited in the original Persian and analyzed by W. Ivanow, Leiden, Holland: E. J. Brill, 1953.

[68] "Yârsânism" Religions in Kurdistan
Sources: The Kurds: A Concise Handbook, by Dr. M. R. Izady, Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations, Harvard University, USA, 1992. http://www.kurdish.com/kurdistan/religion/yarsan.htm (1997-99).

more momentous significance hidden within the divinity Itself. Of course, Sûfism does not argue against the Oneness of Allâh. The quintessence of Allâh transcends duality, yet the Ultimate Reality manifests qualities in creation that are dualistic.

In Kabbalah (a Jewish mystical tradition),[69] just below the first Sphere *(sefirah)* of divine emanation known as Keter (meaning "crown," "summit" or "pinnacle"), lie the two roots of masculine and feminine, known as Hokhmah and Binah. Although they are not masculine and feminine, Hokhmah and Binah are the archetypes of the masculine and feminine. Binah is the Kabbalistic feminine symbol for 'Understanding,' a prelude to wisdom. "Binah, the Great Mother, sometimes also called Marah, the Great Sea, is, of course, the Mother of All Living. She is the archetypal womb through which life comes into manifestation."[70] The "female" principle within God is personified and called by the name: Shekhinah (literally "dwelling"), a term familiar from classical Rabbinical literature. In the Kabbalah, however, the Shekhinah is not only included as a distinctive principle within the inner divine life, but this distinctive principle is explicitly, and quite graphically, described as female."[71]

The Divine Masculine and the Divine Feminine express two very distinct aspects of Allâh. First, that Allâh is Supreme is the principle of masculinity, and that Allâh is Infinite is the principle of femininity.[72]

In the *Qur'ân*, Allâh reveals Itself by giving Itself ninety-nine names. These names are divided up by Islamic Ulama into the names of Majesty *(jalâl)* and the names of Beauty *(jamâl)*. The

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[69] The Hebrew word, Kabbalah from the verb root k-b-l, "to receive," means literally, "oral received tradition."

[70] Fortune, Dion. *The Mystical Qabalah*. Maine: Samuel Weiser, Inc., 1986.

[71] Schäfer, Peter. *Mirror of His Beauty: Feminine Images of God from the Bible to the Early Kabbala.* Princeton University Press, 2003.

[72] "Islam and the Divine Feminine" peNkaLai kâtalikkirên http://www.penkatali.org/feminine.html

names of Majesty call to mind images of the stern and strict "father." while the names of Beauty call to mind images of a gentle and loving "mother." Allâh did not exhaust Itself in creating the world; hence Allâh still exists along with creation. Allâh, in creating the world, is indicative of masculine qualities, such as achievement, strength, dynamism, severity, and rulership. Yet, Allâh is also infinite compared to the finite world. This inconceivably extended aspect of Allâh is the aspect of Allâh that the Sûfî often refers to in ecstatic poetry in the feminine gender. That is why Ibn al-'Arabî says Allâh can be referred to as both Huwa (He) and Hiya (She). One of the drawbacks of the English language is that we do not give gender to nouns. Arabic, like the Romance languages, expresses words with gender. Many of the essential words regarding Allâh are in the feminine gender in Arabic.[73]

In this paper, the author will analyze three of these words: the first is al-Hakîm, the Wise; Wisdom is *hikmah*. In Arabic to say, for example, "Wisdom is precious," you could repeat the feminine pronoun: *al-hikmah hiya thamînah*, literally "Wisdom, she is precious." It is stated by some Sûfî Sheikhs (Masters) that Sûfism originally was named *Sophia*, which connects Sûfism with the Christian Gnostic tradition, in which Wisdom is personified as a woman, the divine Sophia. The physical mother of Jesus was an external image of manifestation of the Virgin Sophia, the word "Sophia" stemming from *Sophos* (wisdom). The Gnostics, whose language was Greek, identified the Holy Spirit with Sophia, Wisdom; and Wisdom was considered female. The Virgin was closely associated by the early church with Wisdom, of the cathedral church at Constantinople, while the ascension of the Virgin Mary refers to the passing of Wisdom into Immortality. The litany of the Blessed Virgin contains the prayer, "Seat of Wisdom, pray for us."

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[73] Armstrong, Karen. *A History of God*. Ballantine Books, 1993.

Julian of Norwich (1343-1420?), English religious writer, an anchoress, or hermit, called Jesus Christ, the second Person of the Roman Catholic "Holy Trinity," our Mother in Wisdom, and our Mother of Mercy or Compassion.[74] The latter title with the words "mercy" and "compassion" returns us to a subtle interpretation of the phrase *Bismillah ir-Rahman ir-Rahim*, often translated as "In the name of Allâh the most Beneficent the most Merciful" but with the added gnosis that God can appear to a human being as the Divine Feminine and that the Divine Feminine is not confined to Christian or Islamic mystical intuitive apprehension of spiritual truths. St. Peter Chrysologos presented the Virgin as the seven-pillared temple which Wisdom had built for herself."[75] The aforementioned philosopher and Sûfî, ibn al-Arabî, saw a young girl in Makkah surround by light and realized that, for him, she was an incarnation of the divine Sophia.[76]

Mary was born of an angelic annunciation; Fātima (the daughter of the Prophet Muhammad) was considered to come from the level of angels. She is considered by many Muslims as divine in origin and several variations of a major *hadīth* describe how she was conceived on the night of *Mi'râj* (ascension). On this night Gabriel took Muhammad to Jerusalem and then to Heaven. While up in Heaven, he was offered some heavenly fruit, the seed of which was responsible for her conception, after the Prophet's return on the same night and making love to his beloved wife Khadija.

Fātima tul Zehra (Fātima the Radiant, Fātima the Brightest Star, Fātima-Star of Venus, Fātima-The Evening Star), the daughter of the Prophet, is the secret in Sûfism. She is the *Hujjat* of 'Alī.

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[74] Baker, Denise Nowakowski, Julian of Norwich's Showings: From Vision to Book, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994, 116.

[75] "Jesus of Nazareth". GNOSTIC SOPHIA. Book of Jesus Volume I Chapter 13 http://www.holyorderofmans.org/Jesus-of-Nazareth/13-gnostic_sophia.htm

[76] "Knowledge of Reality Magazine" Issue # 22 http://www.sol.com.au/kor/kor_22.htm

In other words, she establishes the esoteric sense of his knowledge and guides those who attain it. Through her perfume, we breathe paradise. Though she was his daughter, the Prophet Muhammad called her *Um Abi'ha* (mother of her father). What mystery was the Prophet hinting at by this statement? While Fātima Zehra was Muhammad's daughter, the *Rasulallah* (Prophet of God – Muhammad) understood that his gnosis was bestowed upon him from the Divine Feminine.

Fātima Fatir as representative of Allâh's *Jamal*, saves humankind from Allâh's *Jalal*. Esoterically, if it were not for Fātima (Mercy), Allâh would never have sent Muhammad (Peace be upon him) and the Qur'ān to humanity. The night is the exemplification of our sovereign Fātima, especially the "Night of Destiny" *(laylat al-Qadr)*. Lady Fātima was chosen from all women to be the Mother source of Muhammad's lineage, the core of the generation of Muhammad. Through her, the progeny of the Prophet multiplies – through a woman.[77] The process of giving birth to the spirit is the feminine principle. That to which has been given birth is the masculine. "This is why, in spiritual transformation and rebirth, only the masculine principle can be born, for the feminine principle is the process itself. Once birth is given to the spirit, this principle remains as Fātima, the Creative Feminine, the Daughter of the Prophet, in a state of potentiality within the spirit reborn."[78] Shī'as revere the person of Fātima, for she is the mother of the line of inspired *Imāms* who embodied the divine truth for their generation. As such, Fātima is directly associated with Sophia, the divine wisdom, which gives birth to all knowledge of God. She has thus become another symbolic equivalent of the Great Mother. Lady Fātima (as) has

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[77] Bakhtiar, Laleh. Introduction. Shariati, Dr. Ali. Fatima is Fatima. Tehran: The Shariati Foundation.

[78] Bakhtiar, Laleh. Sufi: Expressions of the Mystic Quest. New York: Avon Books, 1976, p. 23.

various names near Allâh (Exalted Be His Name), they are:

- Fātima (Aleiha Assalam)
- Siddiqah (the honest)
- Al-Mubarakah (the blessed one)
- Al-Tahirah (the pure)
- Az-Zakiyah (the chaste)
- Ar-Radhiatul Mardhiah (she who is gratified and who shall be satisfied)
- Al-Mardiyyah (the one pleasing to Allâh)
- Al-Muhaddathah (a person other than a Prophet, which the angels speak to)
- Az-Zahraa (the splendid)

Fātima was given the title of "az-Zahraa" which means "the Resplendent One." That was because of her beaming face, which seemed to radiate light. However, others, who must keep their beliefs prudently concealed, know the Prophet Muhammad's daughter as "Fātima Fatir". In Her own sacred words, She utters the truth, "There is no God beside me, neither in divinity nor humanity, neither in the Heavens nor on earth, outside of me, who am Fātima – Creator."

It is said by some Sûfîs that there is another great secret regarding Fātima. These Sûfîs say that she was a Prophet from the time of her father's death until the time of her death. After the Prophet's death, Fātima lived seventy-five days. During this time the Archangel Gabriel came to her and consoled her by telling her what her father was doing in the spiritual worlds, what his status was, and what would come about in the Islamic community after her death. Imām 'Alī wrote down what Fātima dictated to him. Her words were collected into what is known as the *Mushaf. Mushaf* refers to a collection of sahifa, which is singular for "page." The literal meaning of *Mushaf* is "The manuscript bound between two boards." In the early days of Islam, people used to write on leather and other materials. They either rolled the writings, what we know

as a "scroll" in English, or kept the separable sheets and bound them together, in what could be called a *Mushaf*, a book in today's terms. Of course, the above narration requires more research and exegesis. "...Fâtima's book, I don't claim that it is *Qur'ân*, rather it contains what makes people need us and makes us in need of no one," stated Imâm Sadiq.[79] According to the traditions of the Ahlul Bayt, Fâtima's Mushaf is not a *Qur'ân*, but most definitely a revelation by Allâh, to the Mistress of Women and Daughter of the Master of Prophets, just as He chose to make revelations to Moses' mother.

Sûfîs are taught to be aware of coincidences. They say that coincidences are merely "Allâh's orders," or "no coincidence, only Providence." Hagia Sophia (Greek, "Holy Wisdom") was the cathedral of Constantinople (today's Istanbul, Turkey).

The second word the author will consider, in this paper, is accounted the second most important name of Allâh, and that is al-Rahmân, the All-Merciful. The first *ayât* (verse) of Al-Fatiha (the most important chapter in the *Qur'ân*) firmly establishes that the two names Al-Rahmân and Al-Rahîm refer to Allâh, the Supreme Power, and to Allâh exclusively. The two names' etymology stems from the same root: RAHM, which can mean "womb" or "place of origin.". There is a *hadîth qudsî* that specifically addresses that: Allâh says, "I am al-Rahmân. I created the womb, and I derived its name from My name. I will be connected to whoever stays connected to it, and I will be cut off from whoever stays cut off from it."

Sister W.H.[80] believes that most translators, in translating these words, do not take into consideration the context in which Allâh refers to Itself as Rahmân or Rahim. Surah Maryam (19) is the Sura in which the name Al-Rahmân is

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[79] Related by Hussein Ibn Alala.

[80] W.H, Sister. "Al-Rahmân"
Introduction to Islam
http://www.quran-islam.org/227.html

mentioned most frequently (sixteen times). In *ayât* 18 of this Sura, Maryam asks for protection from Al-Rahmân against one whom she perceives as a man entering her private chambers, but who in fact is the Archangel Jibreel (Gabriel). Sister W.H. holds that Maryam is asking for protection from the Most Powerful, the Almighty, not mercy from "the Beneficent" as Rahmân is often translated. Sister W.H. continues by stating that Maryam declares this asking for protection from Al-Rahmân to the "intruder" in order also to frighten the "intruder," for which situation the appellation "the Merciful" or "The Most Gracious" would hardly instill fear, and hence also be unsuitable. In every instance of the usage of the name Al-Rahmân in the *Qur'ân*, in the opinion of sister W.H., the only appropriate interpretation is expressed in the name The Almighty. Yet, as Cecilia Twinch perceives in her article *The Beauty of Oneness witnessed in the emptiness of the heart,*[81] "in this state of not knowing what the reality of the situation was, she turned to God with all her being, saying, 'I take refuge in the Merciful (Rahmân) from you.' 'Consequently,' Ibn 'Arabi says, 'she was overwhelmed with a perfect state of the Divine Presence.'"[82]

Nevertheless, Sister W.H. recounts another example of the Almighty power of Al-Rahmân, we have the description in Sura *Taha*, verse 5, that culminates when "Al-Rahmân "is established on the throne." Thus, the Holy *Qur'ân* says, *Inna Rabba-kumulla-hullazi khalaqas-samawati wal-'arza fi sitati 'ayamin sumas-tawa 'alal 'Arsh:* "Your Guardian-Lord is Allâh, Who created the heavens and the earth in six days and is firmly established on the Throne."[83] This is the perfect image

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[81] Twinch, Cecilia. "The Beauty of Oneness witnessed in the emptiness of the heart" Delivered at the MIAS Symposium on Retreat Berkeley, October 1997. The Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi Society http://www.ibnarabisociety.org/twinch.html

[82] Wisdom of the Prophets, (extracts from Ibn Arabi's Fusus al-hikam translated into the French by Titus Burckhardt and into the English by Angela Culme-Seymour, Beshara Publications 1974, p. 69.

[83] Qur'an. Sura 7:54.

of power and authority, the assumption of full authority over everything.

Whatever sister W.H.'s interpretation, the concept of mercy is still relevant in this context. Note translations of the *Towrah* (Torah) of Moosa (Moses) use the word "Mercy-seat"; could this not be a translation of the name Al-Rahmân as "Mercy" and *Al-aarsh* (throne) as "seat"? Bear in mind that these two names, Al-Rahmân, Al-Rahîm are part of the most ancient, profound, and universal revelation of the Divine in the opinion of the Jewish people and the Muslims. Yet is this concept of the "Mercy-seat" limited to the Jewish people and the Muslims? No. The Egyptian Goddess *Isis* is one of the goddesses that has stood the test of time. Isis is the Greek form of more ancient names (Aset or Eset), and the name Isis is represented in hieroglyphics with a picture of a "throne." The throne represented the Feminine power of the Goddess, and the King when he ascends the throne, is actually drawing power from the throne upon which he sits. Halmasuit is the Hittite throne goddess that represents divine legitimization of earthy rulership.

An Doctuir, An t-Athair Sean O Duinn, Department of Irish Mythology University of Limerick, gave a most interesting presentation on the personification of the Land as the Goddess as well as the place of the sacred well in Irish Mythology and early Irish Christianity. He explained that to the pre-Christian Irish, water was the source of all life. *Eire,* after whom the country was named, was the superior Goddess of water and fertility, the island of Ireland being the body of the goddess. The Irish language has no word for the coronation of a king. This is because Irish kings were not crowned; they were married to the goddess in a ceremony called *An Bainais* – the wedding. In the Bainais, the king received the land as his wife and the fruits of the land, and all the wealth of an agricultural

society came under his paternity as issued from the marriage.[84]

Surah 109 in the *Qur'ân*, al-Kawthar, gives an especially revealing look into the Prophet's feminine soul. It was revealed because his enemies had been taunting him that he had no sons, only daughters, while they had been given sons to perpetuate their patriarchal ways. Allâh revealed this message of consolation to the Prophet: "We have given thee al-Kawthar... surely the one who hates thee will be cut off (from progeny)." What is al-Kawthar? Al-Kawthar is a sacred pool of life-giving water in Paradise – a profoundly feminine symbol. The name of Kawthar is derived from the same root as *kathîr* 'abundance', a quality of the supernal Infinite, the Divine Feminine. Allâh established ter Allâh's masculine nature when Allâh says in the *hadîth qudsi*[85] "My mercy precedes My wrath" (rahmatî sabaqat ghadabî). The Prophet also said, "Your body has its rights over you."

Eric Ackroyd, author of *A Dictionary of Dream Symbols: With an Introduction to Dream Psychology*[86] writes about water, "It is a feminine symbol, representing either your own femininity (whether you are a male or female), or your mother." In addition, the Ka'ba stood by a sacred spring, the Zemzem, whose sacred waters are drunk by all good Muslims.[87] The *Hajira* or "sudden departure" although applied to the events following 622 C.E. bears the same name as Hajira (Hagar), who

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[84] Duinn, An Doctuir, An t-Athair Sean O. "Lectures at the Holy Well" Castlemagner Historical Society. http://www.iol.ie/~edmo/lectures.html Qur'an. Sura 7:54.

[85] The hadîth qudsi are hadîths in which the Prophet says that Allâh says so and so. The meaning of the these hadîth was revealed to the Prophet but he put them in his own words, unlike the Qur'an which is the word of Almighty Allâh and the Prophet conveyed it exactly as it was revealed to him.

[86] Ackroyd, Eric. *A Dictionary Of Dream Symbols: With An Introduction To Dream Psychology*. Blandford Press, 1993.

[87] Briffault, R. *The Mothers: A Study of the Origins of Sentiments and Institutions* (3 Volumes). London: George Allen & Unwin LTD, 1952.

discovered the spring of Zemzem flowing by Ishmael's foot when searching for water for him after the "sudden departure" of Ibrahim.

Therefore, we see the Divine Feminine, as the Source of Life, being expressed first by the means that humans may understand the Divine Feminine, in other words, Wisdom, being a feminine word, second, by the two most holy names of Allâh: al-Rahmân and al-Rahim which express in a universal way (spanning cultures as varied as Egyptian, Hittitie and Celtic) that the Source of Life is the Divine Feminine. However, the Divine Feminine does not always manifest in ways that most people think of as traditional, in other words: nurturing, embracing, caring, and so forth. She has a martial aspect too, and so it is not surprising that Al-Rahmân wields power and can appropriately be called The Almighty. Pakistani-American artist Shahzia Sikander has explored the spiritual meaning of the Feminine in South Asia through her female images that blend veiled Muslim women and goddesses like Kali or Durga[88] in the same figure. By depicting the Divine Feminine in her art, she says, "I am interested in the multidimensions of the female identity. The goddess could be a figure of power. It refers to empowerment definitely. And yet there is a certain sort of dark side to it too..."[89]

Now the author will consider the third name, and perhaps the most outstanding of all: al-Dhât. This word, in Arabic, is also

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[88] Kali makes her "official" debut in the Devi-Mahatmya, where she is said to have emanated from the brow of Goddess Durga (slayer of demons) during one of the battles between the divine and anti-divine forces. Etymologically Durga's name means "Beyond Reach." She is thus an echo of the woman warrior's fierce virginal autonomy. In this context Kali is considered the "forceful" form of the great goddess Durga. "Mother Goddess as Kali – The Feminine Force in Indian Art" Article of the Month – August 2000. Exotic India – The One Stop Shop for Indian Arts http://www.exoticindiaart.com/kali.htm

[89] "Art in the twenty-first century" art:21. Shahzia Sikander. Biography: http://www.pbs.org/art21/artists/sikander/

feminine. Allâh is Beyond the Beyond, higher than any action, manner or condition, and any thought that any being may have.[90] This transcendence of all qualities denotes the Divine Feminine. The renowned Sûfi master Najm al-Din Kubra wrote of the Dhât as the "Mother of the divine attributes." On this *makam* or "level of existence," femininity corresponds to interiority and masculinity to manifestation. The ancient Celtic Druids would perform a strange rite after two people married. The Druid would go into the house in which the marriage was consummated and reappear dressed in the bride's gown. He would do this to demonstrate the balance between the masculine and feminine aspects within himself.[91] The Druids were ancient Celtic priests, shamans and philosophers as described in *Neo-Shamanists and Pagans Today P3: From N. Pennick to Celtic/Northern Literature.*[92]

Druid-Shaman-Priest: Metaphors of Celtic Paganism by Leslie Jones further delves into the connection between the Druid and the Shaman.[93] "A Shaman is a man or woman who is able, at will, to enter into a non-ordinary state of consciousness in order to make contact with the spirit world on behalf of members of his or her community."[94] "The distinctive feature of family shamanism was participation by nearly all members of the family in ritual activities. At the same time, peoples of northeastern Siberia had shamans who played the main role in rituals. They included cross-dressing male and female

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[90] Muzaffereddin, Al-Hajj Shaikh, and Shems Friedlander. *Ninety-Nine Names of Allah: The Beautiful Names*. New York: Perennial Library, Harper Colophon Books, 1978.

[91] Naddair, Kaledon. *Keltic Folk & Faerie Tales: Their Hidden Meaning Explored*. Century, 1987.

[92] "Neo-Shamanists and Pagans Today P3: From N. Pennick to Celtic/Northern Literature" Sociology of the Esoteric and Science News, June 28, 2003. http://mailbox.univie.ac.at/~muehleb9/neosh3.html

[93] Jones, Leslie Ellen. *Druid-Shaman-Priest: Metaphors of Celtic Paganism*. Hisarlik Press, 1998.

[94] Margaret Locke; Interview. Capra, Fritjof. *Uncommon Wisdom: Conversations With Remarkable People*. Simon & Schuster, 1988.

shamans. During religious ceremonies *(kamlaniye)*, such male shamans dressed in women's clothes and female shamans dressed in men's clothes. Cross-dressing men and women shamans were regarded as the most powerful."[95] Ibn al-'Arabî divulged, "I sometimes employ the feminine pronoun in addressing Allâh, keeping in view the Essence." The perfection of the human state, *al-insân al-kâmil,* means the perfection of both the masculine and feminine qualities together, and is symbolized by the marriage of Imâm 'Alî (the nephew and brother-in-law of Muhammad) and Fâtima (the daughter of Muhammad).

Love stories abound in all cultures: Romeo and Juliet, Orpheus and Eurydice, Tristan, and Isolde, and in the Middle East, we find the stories of Yusuf and Zuleika, and Majnûn and Laylá. The story of Majnûn and Laylā was (and still is) widely known throughout the Islamic world. However, in the hands of Persian Sûfî poets, the story became transformed into a symbol of the love of a human being for Allâh. In Sûfîsm, questing for Allâh is similar to the European Grail quest in which the Knight quests for a Chalice (the cup being a symbol of the female sexual organ). Laylá, in Arabic, comes from the word *layl* meaning "night." The association of the Divine Feminine with Darkness and the Night is ubiquitous.

The Sumela Monastery, in Trabzon on the shore of the Black Sea, is an important site for the Divine Feminine in Christianity and provides a connection with the concept of the Islamic Laylá. "Sumela" is derived from the Greek words meaning "dark stone." Water drips down from a dark rock near the monastery. "Dark stone" has been a very ancient symbol of the Divine Feminine going back to pagan times, as has been

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95 "Hunters: Spiritual Life" Message from the Museum Directors Illinois State Museum. http://www.museum.state.il.us/exhibits/changing/journey/hunters-spiritual.html

posited in this paper with regard to the black stone of the Ka'ba.[96]

"These days, one of the most powerful archetypes being revived in feminist religion is Lilith, archetype of the 'dark' inner feminine. For ages this goddess had been cast aside and denigrated by patriarchal religion as a demoness, but now she is being looked at with renewed interest. To anyone following Lilith's career, it would be interesting to learn how she already had been rehabilitated centuries ago in Islamic Sûfî guise. She is known to Muslims as Laylā — of Laylā and Majnûn fame. Both names come from the same ancient Semitic root meaning 'night'. The old Akkadian form of her name was Lilitu, from the root L-Y-L, with the feminine ending in -t; it took the form Lilith in Hebrew. The Arabic name Laylá is from the same root with a feminine ending often used in Arabic girls' names."[97]

The blackness of night is an essential quality of the Divine Feminine. The "black cloak" of Muhammad is very famous. The Sûfîs sing about *kali kamaliya vala* (the one wrapped in the black blanket) in their *qawwalis* (spiritual songs). Muhammad's prayer rug was also black, as was the first flag of Islam.

Majnun went crazy because of his love for Laylā. He went out of his mind. The goal of the Sûfî is called *fana* or "annihilation," in which the Sûfî literally goes out of his or her socially conditioned mind. *Majnun* means someone not in an ordinary state of mind. To quote the Dîwân of Shaykh Ahmad al-'Alawî: "I drew near to Laylā's dwelling, when I heard her call. O would that sweet voice never fall silent! She favored me, drew me toward her, and took me into her precinct; then with words

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[96] Dr. Adrienne Momi and Dr. Rashid Ergener "Anatolia Land of Mother Goddess" http://www.mythic-travel.com/about.htm

[97] The Return of Lilith Reintegration, the Dark Feminine, and Sufi Islam" http://www.penkatali.org/lilith.html

most intimate addressed me. She sat by me, then came closer, and raised the garment that veiled her from my gaze; she took me out of myself, amazed me with her beauty... She changed me and transfigured me, marked me with her special seal, pressed me to her, granted me a unique station and named me with her name."

In the nighttime, all that is visible during the day vanishes into the darkness. Boundaries fade away at night. Forms are no longer visible. This apparent lack of manifestation that takes place during the night is directly connected to the unmanifested aspect of the Divine Nature, Allâh as Unmanifest. "Aba'ad," is a very well-known song from the Persian Gulf region. The full-length song is twenty and a half minutes in length. Many dancers and musicians in the United States know this song as "Laylā, Laylā" because about fourteen minutes into the song the lyrics sing "Laylā" many times over and over again. The Saudi Arabian vocalist who made this song popular was Mohammed Abdou. "Laylā, Laylā, Laylā, Allâh, Allâh, Laylā," go the lyrics, intertwining the name Laylā with the name Allâh.

At the top of (or beyond) the Kabbalistic Tree of Life is found three mysterious "veils of negative existence (unmanifestation)." These veils contain and conceal the unmanifest aspects of the entire Tree of Life. The veils are traditionally not illustrated on the Tree of Life. When they are, they are drawn as three semi-circles above Keter. The most remote veil is *Ain*, which represents absolute negative existence. Complete darkness is a symbol of this state. The seed grows in the darkness of the earth and the fetus develops in the darkness of the womb. Each Sheikh has a woman that develops him into a Sheikh. Therefore, in this seemingly patriarchal mystery tradition (Sûfism), we see that woman is the Hidden Initiatrix, the Shadow Guide, the Blackness that births the Light. *"Da tariki, tariqat"* – "In the darkness, the Path," is a Sufic maxim. The void has been described as a dark cave, a shadowy *mihrab*, the Concealed or Secret Radiance,

the Black Stone of the Ka'ba, *Ghayb ul-Ghaib* (Mystery of Mysteries), *Amma* (Darkness), and returning to the Womb of Fātima ('Alaiha Assalam) the Mother.

The Prophet Muhammad pronounced an utterance of supreme compassion and love for the feminine when he was returning from a battle with his Companions. They came upon a group of women and children. One woman had lost her child and was going around looking for him, her breasts flowing with milk. When she found her child, she joyfully put him to her breast and nursed him. The Prophet asked his Companions, "Do you think that this woman could throw her son in the fire?" They answered "No." He then said, "Allâh is more merciful to His servants than this woman to her son."[98] Jalâl al-Din Rūmī, in an amazing passage of the *Masnavi* on the Return to Allâh, made reference to the story of the infant Moses and addressed Allâh directly as "Mother":

> "On Resurrection Day, the sun and moon are released from service:
> and the eye beholds the Source of their radiance,
> then it discerns the permanent possession from the loan, and this passing caravan from the abiding home.
> If for a while a wet nurse is needed,
> Mother, return us to your breast.
> I don't want a nurse; my Mother is more fair.
> I am like Moses whose nurse and Mother were the same."[99]

Nick Herbert, a renowned physicist, states, "Science has succeeded (perhaps too well) in taming Nature; now it's time to learn how to woo Her, seeing Her not as a collection of dead parts but approaching Nature as the very Body of the Beloved."[100]

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[98] From the hadīth collection of Imām al-Bukhari.

[99] Rumi, Jalaluddin. *The Mathnawi Jalaluddin Rumi*. Trans. Reynold A. Nicholson. Gibb Memorial Trust, 2002, V: 701.

[100] "Interview with a Quantum Tantrik" http://www.quantumtantra.com/interview.html

In Islam, there is not the same condemnation of the body as is found in many of the major Christian sects. Spirit if often depicted in Christianity as "male" and the body as "female." The body is not an obstacle in Islam, but rather it is a means to attain enlightenment. Sexual pleasure is not shunned in Islam, but rather incorporated into daily life. To begin with, the body itself is given great significance in Islam when one takes into account the bodily postures that are a necessary and essential part of the compulsory five times a day, prayer. During *salât* (Islamic prayers) the body is metamorphosed into a manifestation of the sacred. These bodily postures are very similar to the bodily postures one observes in Hindu Hatha Yoga, which is a branch of Tantric Yoga. Islam's unitary, holistic view of the body and spirit is evident in the alchemical saying of the Shi'ite Imāms, *"arwâhunâ ajsâdunâ wa-ajsâdunâ arwâhunâ"* (our spirits are our bodies and our bodies are our spirits).

One of the primary goals of the Sûfî is to reawaken the body to an awareness of it being an expression of the divine. The body is not basically sinful (as in the Roman Catholic Church's conception of Original Sin) in Islam, rather the body is the seat of the highest reality created by Allâh in the whole universe. To understand the Divine Feminine in Sûfism, it is helpful to understand a few basics of Tantra Yoga.

Therefore, the author asks the reader's indulgence as he briefly explores Tantra Yoga. The author believes the reader will be richly rewarded for his or her patience. The basic tenet of Tantrism is that matter, and therefore the body, is also a manifestation of Śakti power, that is, the power emanating from the feminine aspect of Divine Reality. In the domain of the spiritual life, the same term Śakti signifies the celestial energy that allows one to enter into contact with the Divinity. Hence, the body must not be opposed or despised. Tantra has been one of the most neglected branches of Indian spiritual studies despite the considerable number of texts devoted to this practice, which dates back to the 5th-9th century C.E.

Tantra itself means, "to weave, to expand, and to spread", and according to Tantric masters, the fabric of life can provide true and ever-lasting fulfillment only when all the threads are woven according to the pattern designated by nature.[101] Sex, being a part of nature, then is considered part of the fabric of life. The physical, spiritual, and mental cannot be separated. To the Tantrics, the body is a form of consciousness, but this consciousness is veiled.

There is a form of Tantra, entitled "Kundalinî Tantra." This is the Yoga of sexual intercourse. In the classical literature of hatha yoga *Kundalini* literally means coiling, like a snake. *Kundalini* can be understood as an immanent and latent liberating power, or as potentiality of liberation. This power lies in wait (is coiled) at the base of the spine of the average person. It is useful to think of *Kundalinî* energy as the very foundation of our consciousness so that when Kundalinî moves through our bodies our consciousness necessarily changes with it. Kundalini Tantra is engaged in precisely for the reason of freeing up this energy that is waiting at the base of the spine and allowing it to flow freely up the spine. In yogic anatomy the *sushumna* is the central channel and conduit for the Kundalinî energy that runs along our spine and up to the crown of our head, the summit of liberation *(brahmarandhra)*. Along this channel are placed seven additional channel networks called *chakras*. These *chakras* are associated with major aspects of our anatomy – for example our throat, heart, solar plexus, and in turn these aspects of our anatomy are related to aspects of our human nature.

What ties Tantra to Sûfîsm is contained in the symbolism of Prophet Muhammad's nighttime ascent to Heaven. The Prophet ascended on al-Burâq, a riding beast with the head of a woman, through the *seven* heavens to the Throne of God.

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[101] Jl, Shri Aghori. "What is Tantra? Part 1: The Basic of Tantrism" Hinduism: What You Need To Know About http://hinduism.about.com/library/weekly/aa082501a.htm

Hadîth relates that the Prophet's bed was still warm when he returned from the *Mi'râj*. On this night, the Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him) reached within *"two bows' length"* of Allâh. Fakhruddin 'Iraqi explains: "Imagine lover and Beloved as a single circle divided by a line into two bow-shaped arcs. This line but seems to exist, yet does not, and if it will be erased at the moment of the Meeting, the circle will appear again as one – as in fact it really is. This then is the secret of *Two Bows' Length*."[102] The secret Sufic explanation of the fact that the Prophet's bed was still warm, is that Muhammad (Peace be upon him) was making this journey while having sexual intercourse with his wife Khadijah.

Additionally, it is possible that Muhammad's nighttime ascent to Heaven, *al-Mi'râj,* was mediated by a hallucinogenic plant. Baqir Majlisi reports, "It is related from the Prophet that over each leaf and seed of the *isfand* plant an angel is appointed so that through its bark and roots and branches grief and sorcery are set aside."[103] There is an Iranian folksong about *isfand*.

> "Our Prophet selected it,
> 'Ali planted it, Fatima collected it
> For Husayn and Hasan.
> All who are born on Saturday,
> On Sunday, or on Monday,
> On Tuesday, or on Wednesday,
> On Thursday, or on Friday;
> Underground, on the ground;
> Black-eyed, blue-eyed, crow-eyed, ewe-eyed;
> All who have looked, all who have not;
> Neighbor on left, neighbor on right;
> Before the face, behind the back;

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[102] Iraqi, Fakhruddin. *Divine Flashes*. Trans. and Intro. William Chittick and Peter Lamborn Wilson, New York, Paulist Press, 1982, p. 98.

[103] Rudgley, Richard. *Essential Substances: A Cultural History of Intoxicants in Society*. Ed. John Urda. Kodansha International; Reprint edition (August 1995).

May the eye of the envious and of envy
crack!"[104]

The Book of Plants by Abu Hanifa al-Dinawari (circa about 895 C.E.) states that harmel is discernible in two forms. One has leaves like the Egyptian willow and white fragrant flowers like those of jasmine. Sesame oil and Moringa seed oil become fragrant with this blossom. Its seed is a long capsule like that of Cassia. The other is called in Persian, *isfand*, and its capsule is round. Harmel contains the psychoactive compounds (harmine, harmaline, and tetrahydroharmine).[105]

In most ancient hunter-gatherer societies, women balanced the male's supply of game with their collected harvest from the surrounding wilderness. Women therefore became the first to learn the secrets of plants, and plant propagation. This knowledge led to the development of agriculture, and the evolution from the animal totems of the hunter-gatherers to images of the Great Mother, who with proper worship produced her abundant harvest in the same way that women produced children. In various Mystery Cults, traditional ingestion of hallucinogenic plants allowed members the option of seeking a personal relationship with deity.

Interpretation of the *Qur'ān* in the light of Sahaja Yoga was the topic of the first international conference of the Islamic Study Group in the city of Lucknow. Various Muslim scholars from around the globe dwelt on the divine powers of Nirmala Devi, who it is claimed rediscovered the magic of Sahaja Yoga. The members discussed the benefits of this form and how Muslims could benefit from it. Speaking on this occasion, Mr. Husain

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[104] This song was brought to my attention by Mr. Frederick R. Dannaway.

[105] "HARMEL AND YAGE (Notes taken from a thesis on soma, moly, yage and other psychotropic drugs)"
Source: Flattery, David. Haoma and Harmaline: The Botanical Identity of the Sacred Hallucinogen "Somo" and Its Legacy in Religion, Language, and Middle Eastern Folklore. University of California Press, May 1989. http://www.iras.ucalgary.ca/~volk/sylvia/Haoma.htm

Top, a renowned Sûfî saint from Turkey, said the seven heavens mentioned by the prophet were in fact seven "chakras" of consciousness. "God sees through man and he hears through man," the Sûfî saint said. Mr. Top explained how in the final stage of consciousness man is enveloped by the will of God and in this state he attains union with the Almighty and finds peace.[106] The human beloved becomes a witness *(shahed)*, a Theophany of the Real.[107] Ibn Tamiya had remarked a practice that reflected the last of these views, noting that a mystic might kiss his or her beloved and say to him or her, "Thou art God."[108] Abdelwalah Bouhdiba describes the mystical approach to sexuality in Sûfîsm, "The body of a woman, therefore, is a microcosm of the masterly work of God. To lose oneself in it is to find oneself in God. To run over it is to continue the great book of Allâh."[109]

An eighteenth-century Gujarati text of the Satpanth Nizari Isma'ilis tells of a renowned Isma'ili and Sûfî master imparting Tantric spiritual instruction to a Nath Siddha Jogi master. It includes both Islamic and Tantric terms and demonstrates the intersection of these two traditions. A portion of this document has been published with a study by Dominique Sila Khan as "Conversation between Guru Hasan Kabiruddin and Jogi Kanipha: Tantra Revisited by the Isma'ili Preachers." [110]

Sometimes when the Divine Feminine is realized in all Her Splendor, She so transforms her devotees that their forms of worship are transformed also. Hence Islamic and Sûfî groups

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[106] Article The Hindustan Times 9 Feb. 1998.

[107] Wilson, Peter Lamborn. *Sacred Drift: Essays on the Margins of Islam*. San Francisco: City Light Books, 1993, 60-61.

[108] Taymîya, Ibn. *Al-Radd 'alâ Ibn 'Arabî wa-l-sûfîya*. p. 56; cited by Ritter (Meer, pp. 476-77).

[109] Bouhdiba, Abdelwahab. *Sexuality in Islam* London. Routledge & Kegan Paul plc, 1985, p. 135.

[110] Khan, Dominique Sila. "Conversation between Guru Hasan Kabiruddin and Jogi Kanipha: Tantra Revisited by the Isma'ili Preachers." *Tantra in Practice*. Ed. David Gordon White. U.K. Delhi, Motilal Banarsidass: 2001.

arise that are considered heretical to mainstream Islamic and Sûfî belief structures through attention and study of the feminine aspects of divinity. The concept that Allâh is the feminine form of the Ultimate Reality is the inner secret of the most esoteric mysteries of Islam. Ibn 'al-'Arabî pronounced: "True divinity is female, and Makkah is the womb of the Earth." Because he said the godhead was feminine, they accused Ibn al-'Arabî of blasphemy. Allâh commanded reverence for womankind in the Qur'ân.[111] "Pay ye heed to Allâh on whose bounty ye depend and pay ye heed to womankind!"[112] Prophet Muhammad said that woman is the greatest treasure in the world. One of Sûfîsm's first saints, Râbi'ah, is held with equal reverence as any male saint. In Chapter 9 of the *Qur'ān, At-Taubah*, it is written: "Then Allâh did send down His Sakînah (calmness, tranquility and reassurance, etc.) on the Messenger (Muhammad), and on the believers, and sent down forces (angels)..." Then in Sura 48 we find: "It is He who sent down the Sakînah into the hearts of the believers, that they might add faith to their faith."

The *Sakînah* in Islam is a manifestation of the Divine Feminine, very similar to the *Shekinah* in the Hebrew tradition. Prophecies of the return of the *Shekinah*, which had left the Temple and city of Jerusalem in the days of Ezekiel, are repeated in Zechariah. The word is also used to describe the mystical *Shekinah* presence in the tabernacle. *Shekinah* in Hebrew is a feminine noun; it is interesting that Isaiah refers to the Shekinah using feminine pronouns.[113]
In Arabic, *Barakah* means blessing or Divine Grace. It is a feminine Arabic name. *Barakah* also carries the meaning of

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[111] Qur'an. Sura 4:1.

[112] Qur'an, Sura: Nisa, *The Message of the Qur'an: Presented in Perspective by Hashim Amir-Ali*, Charles E. Tuttle Company, Rutland, Vermont & Tokyo, Japan, 1974.

[113] Isaiah 51:9 and 10, and its context the pronouns are feminine. In verse 10 the KJV uses Thou and It to refer to the Shekinah. Both pronouns are feminine in Hebrew. The Qumran text makes the feminine form certain, literally feminine "You She" translated in KJV "Thou It."

"soul power," the "blessing," "irradiation of sanctity," or the "protective energy," all of which constitute so many images of the celestial Femininity.

Some contemporary feminists have condemned Muslim men for forcing Muslim women to wear the veil. First, it must be made clear that the veil is a patriarchal *cultural* accretion that is not a rule of Islam. However, the veiling of women, suggests mystery and sacralization. The Prophet said of himself: "The Law *(sharî'ah)* is what I say; the Path *(Tarîqah)* is what I do; and Knowledge *(Haqîqah)* is what I am." The Law carries with it connotations of masculine action, while Knowledge carries with it a sense of feminine intuition. One can truly experience the Divine Feminine only through this Knowledge. Prophet Muhammad also said, "Three things from your world have been made beloved to me: women, and perfume, and prayer the comfort of my eyes." The great Shaykh Tosun Bayrak al-Jerrahi al-Halveti in his article "True Love"[114] writes, "The Prophet of Allâh, when he tells of the things he was made to love, puts woman above man. He uses the word *thalath*, feminine three, not *thalathah*, masculine three, and yet in the same sentence there is the word *tib* – perfume, which is masculine. In Arabic grammar when it is said, for example, 'Fâtima and Zayd came,' the verb is in the masculine form. Thus, the Prophet has purposefully and ungrammatically given precedence to the female over the male. In addition to the first loved one being feminine, third loved one, *salât,* is also (grammatically) feminine. The pattern is repeated thus: *Dhat* (Essence) is feminine; Adam is masculine; Eve is feminine. It is the concept of trinity: man (masculine) is between two feminines. They are linked: Essence to man; man to woman; woman to Essence."

Unfortunately, many of the sexual revelations of the Saints of Sûfism have been repressed. We are only now becoming

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[114] Bayrak al-Jerrahi al-Halveti, Shaykh Tosun. "True Love" http://www.crescentlife.com/spirituality/true_love.htm

aware of the great extent of these teachings. The Muslim Mullah and scholar, Imām Sūyutī, wrote at least nine known works on erotic techniques. Sūyutī is considered one of latter-day Islam's greatest exoteric scholars. Most of his peers also wrote one or two works on the subject, some were quite prolific.[115] Ibn al-'Arabî also wrote a book of erotic poetry titled *Tarjumân al-ashwâq* (The Interpreter of Desires) which has meaning on both the erotic level and the spiritual level at once. Ruzbihan Baqli, a great Sûfî saint, wrote, "He poured me the wines of proximity; it was as though I was in that place like a bride in the presence of God. What took place after that cannot enter into expression. He graced me in a form that I cannot tell to any of God's creatures, and he was unveiled and there manifested from him the lights of his beautiful attributes."[116] Sûfîs have had to be very careful in their mystical descriptions of their encounters with the Divine Feminine, as Sûfîs have been tortured and martyred for their sayings and writings which offend the traditional patriarchal view of Islam.

Pagla Kanai, a Bengali Muslim poet in the nineteenth century, identified Fātima as "Mother Tara" or "Mother Tarini" and prayed to her in this passage that blends Islam and Śaktism:

> "O mother, Pagla Kanai, who is of no
> consequence
> cries for you with every breath;
> please cast a little shadow of your feet on me;
> O Mother, take me to your feet.
> O Mother Tara, the redeemer of the world,
> O Mother Tarini, you shall appear as the savior of
> Muslims

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[115] S, Mr. Kamal. "Islam and Sacred Sexuality" http://www.gaia-web.org/gaia-wicca/ philosophy/sexuality/islam.html

[116] Baqli, Shaikh Ruzbihan. *The Unveiling of Secrets: Diary of a Sufi Master* (original title: Kashf al-asrar) Trans. Ernst, C. W., Chapel Hill, N.C., 1997, p. 54.

when Israfil will blow his horn,
when everything will be reduced to water,
and when your father's community will sink into water
without a boat."[117]

Pagla Kanai also compared Fātima to the goddess Kali and considered her more virtuous:

"Mother Kali is virtuous indeed—
she stood on her husband's chest!
Did my gracious mother (Fatima) ever trample Ali?"[118]

The Prophet Muhammad never advocated celibacy. According to a *hadīth*, "marriage is half the religion"; and in some Sûfî orders, a student of Sûfîsm cannot be considered for initiation until he or she is married. To know the Absolute, one must experience the primordial totality of the soul. Therefore, sexual union provides the Sûfî with a glimpse of this Totality or Unity. The Prophet of Islam taught that when husband and wife look in each other's eyes with love, their sins are forgiven. When they hold hands, good deeds are recorded for them. When they make love, they are surrounded by praying angels. One statement of the Prophet is that: "In the sexual act of each of you there is a *sadaqa*."[119] The Prophet also stated, "Three things are counted inadequacies in a man. Firstly, meeting someone he would like to get to know, and taking leave of him before learning his name and his family. Secondly, rebuffing the generosity that another shows to him. And thirdly, going to his wife and having intercourse with her

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[117] Tara is a Tantric Śakti goddess (mahavidya), one of the best-loved manifestations of Śakti for Tantric practitioners, and as such she has appealed to the hearts of Bengali Muslims as much as the Prophet's beloved daughter Fātima.

[118] Roy, Asim. *The Islamic Syncretic Tradition in Bengal*. Princeton University Press, 1984, p. 94-95.

[119] Sadaqa, in Arabic, is a form of Worship defined primarily as a charitable gift; the implication here is that the sexual act is a gift. Second, Sadaqa is an act of worship, a rite.

before talking to her and gaining her intimacy, (and) satisfying his need from her before she has satisfied her need from him."

In other words, the Prophet stated that a proper Muslim man understands that the woman takes priority before the man in reaching orgasm. This statement of Muhammad is a clear indication that Islam (as was taught and practiced during Muhammad's life) regarded women in the marriage bed as equal, if not superior, to men.

The Sûfî and Exoteric legalist scholar, Imām Abu Hamid al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111), stated that, "Sex should begin with gentle words and kissing." The scholar of both outward exoteric studies, and inward studies, Imām al-Zabidi adds, in his commentary on al-Ghazālī: "This should include not only the cheeks and lips; and then he should caress the breasts and nipples, and every part of her body."

Regarding foreplay, Muhammad stated, "Not one of you should fall upon his wife like an animal; but let there first be a messenger between you." "And what is that messenger?" they asked; and he replied, "Kisses and words." In his Magnum Opus Encyclopedia of the Islamic Religious Sciences, the *Ihya Ulūm al-Dīn,* Imām Abu Hamid al-Ghazālī stated, "When he has come to his orgasm (inzal), he should wait for his wife until she comes to her orgasm likewise; for her climax may well come slowly. If he arouses her desire, and then sits back from her, this will hurt her, and any disparity in their orgasms will certainly produce a sense of estrangement. A simultaneous orgasm will be the most delightful for her, especially since her husband will be distracted by his own orgasm from her, and she will not therefore be afflicted by shyness."[120] This book, the *Ihya Ulūm al-Dīn* has been for over a thousand or so years the most popular work on the Islamic religious sciences,

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[120] al-Ghazzali, Imam. *Ihya Ulum Id-Deen*. Trans. Maulana Fazlul-Karim. Islamic Book Services India.

indeed it is a bestseller now in the Muslim world, and its sub-books have popular English translations even today.

Female-oriented religions are directly connected with birth and the body, nurturing, fecundity, nonviolence, wholeness, spirals, circles, and the Underworld. Perhaps this is the profound insight that the Prophet Muhammad had when he said, "Paradise is found at the feet of the mother." The secret Sûfî understanding of this *hadîth* is that the Arabic word for foot is the same word for the female pubic bone, suggesting that illumination can be found through sexual intercourse between two married Sûfîs in the station of Haqq. The great Sûfî Sheikh, Ibn 'Arabî, "practiced... the exaltation of sexual intercourse as a supreme method of realization,"[121] and transmitted his direct knowledge from Allâh to fourteen women, eight of whom received this transmission in dreams.[122]

Christianity, through contact with Sûfism, has awakened to the Divine Feminine, in the form of chivalry or courtly love, characterized by the cult of the "Lady" and by a no less particular devotion for the Virgin. The poetry of spiritualized *Eros* was passed along through the courtly love songs of the *troubadours* and the deliberately veiled symbolism of the alchemists. Patriarchal Christianity in the early Middle Ages condemned women as inferior and the cause of sin and enforced the most repressive rules ever. It was only when the benign influence of Islam and Sûfism began to make itself felt in Europe that Christendom began to ease up on its misogyny. The High Middle Ages of Europe arose from contact with Islamic civilization. Queen Eleanor of Aquitaine (1122-1204) was a key figure in this (and according to Idries Shah she was descended from Prophet Muhammad). At her Court of Love at

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[121] Wilson, Peter Lamborn. *Sacred Drift: Essays on the Margins of Islam*. San Francisco: City Light Books, 1993.

[122] Addas, Claude. *Ibn 'Arabi, Ou La quête du Soufre Rouge*. Paris: Gallimard, 1989.

Poitiers, she was a great patroness of the arts and encouraged the troubadours who sang of courtly love, that is, spiritualized Eros, which came from Sûfîsm. She promoted the idea that real men loved and honored women, rather than fighting feudal wars or becoming monks.

After this, Western civilization began to soften toward women, and the veneration of Mary came to the forefront. However, "sacred sex" had to remain underground in Christianity and could only be detected in the veiled, symbolic language of the poets and the alchemists. The French troubadour Peire Vidal (d. 1205?) said in one of his poems: "I think I see God when I look on my lady nude." He was put on trial and nearly burned at the stake. Sûfîs have often had to practice the art of *taqiya* (or concealment). That is, they practice the customs and religious practices of the people amongst whom they are living, in order not to be martyred by the prevailing traditionalists. The same became true for those who were privy to the arts of sacred sex during the Middle Ages. Many alchemical texts are actually manuals of coital practices to achieve Divine Awareness through sexual ecstasy. Books like the *Perfumed Garden*[123] were considered marginal in the Islamic world, the better-known corpus of sexual and erotic literature on its spiritual and worldly significance is, in general, un-translated.

An ongoing debate regarding the derivation of the name Allâh is being waged among oriental scholars. To conclude this article, the author presents a sampling of the various claims asserted about the origin of the name "Allâh" and the relation of these assertions to the Divine Feminine.

1. Among the Qur'ânic references to its 7th Century pagan milieu may be found mention of three

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[123] Nafzawi, Umar Ibn Muhammad. *The Perfumed Garden of the Cheikh Nefzaoui: A Manual of Arabian Erotology.* Trans. Richard Francis Burton. New American Library, 1999.

goddesses, called daughters of Allâh: Al-Lat, Al-'Uzza and Manat; these are also known from earlier inscriptions in northern Arabia. Al-Lat (the Goddess) may have had a role subordinate to that of El (Ilâh), as "daughter" rather than consort.[124]

2. The gods mentioned in the *Qur'ān* are all female deities: Al-Lat, al-Uzza and Manat, which represented the Sun, the planet Venus, and Fortune, respectively; at Makkah they were regarded as the daughters of Allâh. As Allâh meant "the god", so Al-Lat means "the goddess".[125]

3. 'Alī-ilâh; the god; the supreme; the all-powerful; all-knowing; and totally unknowable; the predeterminer of everyone's life destiny; chief of the gods; the special deity of the Quraysh; having three daughters: Al Uzzah (Venus), Manah (Destiny) and Alat; having the idol temple at Makkah under his name (House of Allâh); the mate of Alat, the goddess of fate.[126]

4. The Quraysh tribe into which Muhammad was born was particularly devoted to Allâh, the moon god, and especially to Allâh's three daughters who were viewed as intercessors between the people and Allâh. The worship of the three goddesses, Al-Lat, Al-Uzza, and Manat, played a significant role in the worship at the Ka'ba in Makkah. The first two daughters of Allâh had names that were feminine forms of Allâh.[127]

5. Allâh, the moon god was married to the sun goddess. Together they produce the three goddesses (the daughters of Allâh), Al-Lat, Al-Uzza and Manat. All of

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[124] "Arabian Religions." *Encyclopedia Britannica*: 15th edition, 1979, p.1057.

[125] Guilaume, Alfred. *Islam*. Pelican, 1956, p. 6-7.

[126] Afshari, M. J. Is Allah The Same God As The God Of The Bible?

[127] Morey, Robert A. *Islamic Invasion*. Christian Scholars Press, 2001.

these 'gods' were viewed as being the top of the pantheon of Arab deities.[128]

6. The shrine of the sacred stone in Makkah, formerly dedicated to the pre-Islamic Triple Goddess Manat, Al-Lat (Allâh), and Al-Uzza, the 'Old Woman' was worshipped by Muhammad's tribesmen the Koreshites. The stone was also called *Kubaba, Kuba*, or *Kube*, and has been linked with the name of Cybele (Kybela), the Great Mother of the Gods. The stone bore the emblem of the *yoni*, like the Black Stone worshipped by votaries of Artemis... priests of the Ka'ba are still known as Sons of the Old Woman.[129]

7. Lane's Arabic-English Lexicon (which is based on classical Arabic dictionaries), says under the word Allâh, while citing many linguistic authorities: "Allâh... is a proper name applied to the Being Who exists necessarily, by Himself, comprising all the attributes of perfection, a proper name denoting the true god... the *al* being inseparable from it, not derived..." Thus according to the Lane's Arabic-English Lexicon, Allâh is thus a proper name, not derived from anything, and the Al is inseparable from it. The word *al-ilâh* (the god) is a different word.[130]

8. In Lane's Arabic-English Lexicon the words *ilâh* (god) and Allâh occur under the root A-L-H, but the word Al-lat is given under an entirely different root L-T. Therefore, "Al-lat" is not the feminine form of the word Allâh (for in that case it would occur under the same

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[128] Mercatante, Anthony S. *The Facts on File Encyclopedia of World Mythology and Legend.* Facts on File, Inc., 1989.

[129] Rootswoman. "Re: Before Allah ...was the Mother" New Reasoning Forum - New Rastafari Speaks Board.

[130] Lane, Edward William. *Arabic English Lexicon.* Intl Book Centre; Reprint edition, 1984.

root as for "Allâh") but is derived from a completely different root with a totally different meaning.[131]

9. Allat, according to recent study of the complicated inspirational evidence, is believed to have been introduced into Arabia from Syria, and to have been the moon goddess of North Arabia. If this is the correct interpretation of her character, she corresponded to the moon deity of South Arabia, Almaqah, `Vadd, `Amm, or Sin as he was called, the difference being only the oppositeness of gender. Mount Sinai (the name being an Arabic feminine form of Sin) would then have been one of the centers of the worship of this northern moon goddess. Similarly, al-`Uzza is supposed to have come from Sinai, and to have been the goddess of the planet Venus. As the moon and the evening star are associated in the heavens, so too were Allat and al-`Uzza together in religious belief, and so too are the crescent and star conjoined on the flags of Arab countries today.[132]

10. The ancient Greek historian Herodotos in the first volume of his historic work "Histories Apodexis," line 131-132, refers to the religion of the Persians. He writes, "They sacrifice to the sun and the moon and the earth and the fire and the water and the winds. Only to those they sacrifice of old. In addition, they learnt to sacrifice to Urania,[133] too. They learnt it from the Assyrians and the Arabs. The Assyrians call Aphrodite Mylitta,[134] the Arabs Alilat..."[135]

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[131] Lane, Edward William. *Arabic English Lexicon*. Intl Book Centre; Reprint edition, 1984.

[132] Finegan, Jack. *The Archeology of World Religions*. Princeton University Press, 1952, p. 482-485, 492.

[133] Urania = The Celestial One, i.e., Aphrodite.

[134] Assyrian: Bilit

[135] Heger, Christoph.
Newsgroups: soc.religion.islam

11. It seems unlikely that the name Allâh comes from *al-ilaah* "the God," but rather from the Aramaic/Syriac *alaha,* meaning "God" or "the God." The final "a" in the name Alaha was originally the definite article "the" and is regularly dropped when Syriac words and names are borrowed into Arabic. Middle eastern Christianity used Alah and Alaha frequently, and it would have often been heard. However, in the Aramaic/Syriac language there are two different "a" vowels, one rather like the "a" in English "hat" and the other more like the vowel in "ought." In the case of Alah, the first vowel was like "hat" and the second like "ought." Arabic does not have a vowel like the one in "ought," but it seems to have borrowed this vowel along with the word Alah. Those scholars who know Qur'ânic Arabic, know that the second vowel in *alla* is unique; it occurs only in that one word in Arabic. Scholars believe that Jesus spoke mostly Aramaic, although sometimes he spoke Hebrew and he might have spoken Greek on some occasions. If Jesus spoke Aramaic, then he referred to God using basically the same word that is used in Arabic.[136]

12. The word "Allâh," as a lot of other words, especially words of the religious sphere, was imported from the Syriac (Aramaic) language: "Alaha" – with three long a-vowels – is the Aramaic word for the (Christian) unique God. The last (long) "a" characterizes the *status absolutus* in the Aramaic language and was duly omitted by the Arabs like case endings in the Arabic vernacular, whereas the understanding of the first syllable of "Alaha" as an article was a common misunderstanding like for instance in Al-Iskandar from

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Subject: Re: How About That Moon God?
Date: Wed Mar 25 18:59:38 EST 1998

[136] The Origin of the name "Allah"
http://answering-islam.org/Quran/Sources/alaha.html

> Greek Alexandros etc. The doubling of the "L" is irrelevant, since the doubling sign is a very late invention of Arabic orthography, centuries after Muhammad.[137]

It is noteworthy that during the Zikrullahs of the Chadhiliyya Sûfî Order, the dervishes chant the name of Allâh in 4/4 (four quarter) time with three distinct vocalizations on beats one, two and three, with a rest on the fourth beat. On beat number one, they chant the first "A" of Allâh. On beat number two, they chant "llâh" of Allâh. And on beat number three, they distinctly chant another "A" (pronouncing it exactly as the "A" chanted on the first beat). They repeat this throughout their Zikruallah, sometimes only vocalizing three staccato quarter notes in 4/4 (four quarter) time. This trinity of sounds mimics the trinity of man (masculine) between two feminines observed by Shaykh Tosun Bayrak al-Jerrahi al-Halveti in his article "True Love" as discussed earlier in this paper. Since the Chadhiliyya Sûfî Order is centered in Cairo, it is not beyond the realm of conjecture that they obtained the Aramaic word for God from the Coptic Christians in the area.[138]

The Divine Feminine, while hidden and mysteriously woven throughout Sûfîsm, nevertheless will not be denied, but will reveal Herself to those worthy of the knowledge. Is the Divine Feminine an aspect of Allâh, the form by which Allâh unveils Allâh to human beings, the Ultimate Reality of Allâh, the Dark Unmanifest cosmic womb from which Ya Nur (The Light) bursts forth?

Her nature is as fluid as the dominion of water, which is a symbol of the Divine Feminine. "It has a voice and can be silent, murmur gently when tranquil or range and roar when it

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[137] Heger, Christoph. Newsgroups: soc.religion.islam Subject: Re: How About That Moon God? Date: Wed Mar 25 18:59:38 EST 199.

[138] La Chadhiliyya: Sufi Chants from Cairo Institut Du Monde Arabe Audio CD (November 16, 1999) ASIN: B000034D5I.

is tempestuous. Water has many powers. It has the ability to refresh men and animals and to restore new life to dried out vegetation. It can heal and purify and also has the capacity to destroy. Water symbolizes the original fountain of life, which precedes all form and all creation. Many myths and legends are based on a concept of there being a primeval ocean or watery abyss that was the source of all life. In the Hebrew view of creation, it is said that 'the Spirit of God moved on the face of the Waters' and that 'the waters of the Torah' are the life-giving waters of the sacred law. In the *Qur'ān* it is said, 'From the water we made every living thing.'"[139]

In the *Dao-de jing* of Lao-zi, the author writes, "The gateway of the mysterious female is called the root of Heaven and Earth. Though constantly flowing, it seems always to be present."[140]

The waters flowing, from this gateway of the Divine Feminine, stream throughout Sûfî thought and practice.

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[139] "The Symbolic Meaning of Water" The Active Birth Centre
http://www.activebirthpools.com/symbolic.html

[140] "Passages on Feminine Power"
From the Dao-de jing of Lao-zi
Trans. Randall Nadeau, Trinity University
http://www.trinity.edu/rnadeau/Asian%20Religions/Lecture%20Notes/Chinese%20Religions/Chinese%20Women%20Tao%20Text.htm

She is Coming

Kelly Stewart Hall

I AM bringing my full presence back to earth,
and *many won't be ready*.
Because you only heard half-truths from the pulpit
Because you became afraid of your own selves,
Because you and I took what was
good and holy,
and made a whore out of her (out of us)...
I held back.
I didn't give what was possible, I didn't give My full measure.
I gave you what you could handle,
but that time has come to an end.
If you believe that Sophia is too much to behold,
She will blow right through your fingers.
If you believe Her voice to be like a siren
you can't turn away from,
Wisdom is not for you then.
If you believe the woman Wisdom is to be neutered, buttoned up,
and cross legged,
you need to get a grip...because She is coming!
She is coming, and she is fully liberated!
Fully herself.
unclothed, naked, and nuclear.
She is coming to heal this planet.
And tend to Her creation. She will weed out hate, She will plant
ancestral seeds, She will strain Her waters,
And pulverize human waste.
She will not bother Herself with the reasoning of men.
She will not bow down to those who resisted Her
but *to the willing,* will build lush gardens in once-desolate hearts.

Asian civilizations and renames East Asian patriarchal civilizations pseudo-Magoist. Daly's radical feminist methodology constitutes the backbone of the Magoist methodology of East Asian feminism.

[Author's Note: This essay is from *The Mago Way: Re-discovering Mago, the Great Goddess from East Asia* (Mago Books, 2015).]

Why, as a Muslim Woman, I'm Grateful for My Body

Kim Mohiuddin

ANOTHER WHITE MUSLIM CONVERT once told me, "I'm glad I decided to follow Islam before I met too many Muslims." As he was a man, I'm impressed that he was able to stick to his faith despite coming up against many so-called believers who communicate in a way that seems far from the message of love and compassion revealed in the Quran.

I say, "as a man," because my female biology has allowed me to remain connected with Allah, even when the behavior of Muslims, some very close to me, has been alienating. From the time we first bleed—in cycle with the moon, just as Islam marks the passage of time—to opening our bodies to the act of love and the vulnerability and power required to carry and birth a baby, we women are reminded of the Creator and our place in the cycle of creation.

* * *

Descanso: Here I place a roadside cross (or crescent, if you prefer) for those women who wished to bear children but could not, reverence for those who became mothers to people not of their own bodies, and love for my sisters who faced judgment because they did not wish to have children. I believe that the concept of "woman as mother" is not limited to literal children, as we all give birth to whatever creations we put forth into the world. In fact, as women, whenever our individual lives don't match society's expectations, we are challenged to connect with the Divine, to recognize that we have an inner guidance system that supersedes external messages.

* * *

With my very biology connecting me to God, why bother having a religion at all? Isn't that rather like a bird buying a flying machine?

Raised as a Lutheran in a fairly liberal environment (our congregation was welcoming to people of various races, sexual orientations, and even belief systems), I saw Sunday school, choir practice, the service itself, and the post-church coffee hour as a chance to socialize. The Bible was a literary work. God was distant and male.

He was a bronze, 1970s-style Jesus on the altar—kind-looking enough, but static in his robes, which seemed stuck mid-flow. I lost touch with Him and his Father as close companions and real entities when I was very young. The Holy Spirit was something truly ephemeral—some kind of benevolent ghost, maybe. My Sunday school teacher told me to pray for what I wanted, so I spent many nights in bed sincerely asking God to fill my room with toys while I slept. "In Jesus' name. Amen."

I believed I would wake up to a kind of magical wonderland of streamers, jack-in-the-boxes, music makers, and stuffed animals. But it didn't work. Either the order/fulfillment model I'd been taught was broken, or I wasn't worthy. Still, I liked the music and coffee cake church brought into my life.

My world outside of church was more spiritually significant for me. I went to meetings of the Theosophical Society with my father, attended Thursday bhajans (spiritual singalongs) with my mother, who followed an Indian guru, and lived for a couple of years at the International Buddhist Mediation Center in Los Angeles. I even spent part of my mid-twenties living and working with a fun-loving group of Israelis, which resulted in my attending the occasional Seder.

I developed an "all roads lead to Rome" approach to spirituality, noting a similar sense of connection and good feeling in each of these settings.

My Israeli friends, many of them fresh from their mandatory army service, had traveled the world on the cheap. I was inspired by that and made my own plans to backpack through Asia in early 2002. Just after I bought my plane ticket, the shock of September 11, 2001 hit us. Despite the fears my family had about me traveling in the ensuing months, I headed for Asia, where my perception of myself as open to various spiritual outlooks was challenged.

I found myself in Mysore in the South of India, feeling some trepidation as I passed the city's biggest place of Muslim worship, The Green Mosque. I didn't want to judge Islam, but my heart beat faster when I saw a group of men praying towards Mecca or recognized Arabic writing. I was mad at myself. I thought my feelings couldn't be co-opted by the media or my culture, or even my family. There was this sense that brown Muslim terrorists were "out there" to "get me."

Of course, the truth was that, at the time, the United States was "surgically" bombing Afghanistan. Graphic pictures of innocent Muslims killed and injured in Operation Enduring Freedom were appearing on the front pages of The Hindustan Times. It seemed as if my countrymen were at least as dangerous as any imagined "them" "out there." This was a provocative opinion to have in an era when America seemed to have gone mad with the "if you're not with us, you're against us" outlook of the White House.

I was also meeting some of "them." More than 10% of the world's Muslims live in India, and if you go to the country and are not invited to tea by at least one nice Muslim family or shopkeeper, then you're spending too much time in your room.

Jamshed and Rashid were two brothers who ran a little convenience cart outside my front door. They sold me small, sweet bananas for one rupee each and supplied me with lemon-scented Odomos lotion to keep the mosquitoes at bay. They introduced me to their source for desserts from their home region of Kerala (the fried banana stuffed with coconut was a mind-blowing experience) and asked many questions about me and my country. They were kind and curious.

Then there was Muhamad, the Kashmiri shopkeeper in Bangalore who sold me a horrible sari and some beautiful papier mâché tchotchkes. We talked quite a bit about his family and their safety, about his business, coming down south each winter with his wares, and how his brothers took turns running the store and caring for their parents.

When I met my future husband, a dental student who owned the internet café where I checked my email, I read the Quran for his sake. I wanted to understand him and his religion better. What struck me about the Quran was the concept of a direct connection between the Divine and the creation. There was no need for a priest or a pope, no need to invoke anyone's name. You could just have a chat with God any old time you wanted. She was as close as your jugular at all times (Quran 50:16) and your relationship with Her was deeply personal, not something to be enforced or judged by an outside party. That was a concept of God I could get behind.

When I told my fiancé I would become Muslim, and that we could raise our children as Muslim if he liked, I felt as if I'd made a decision. He replied, "Of course our children will have to be Muslim." His de facto assumption foreshadowed the difficulty I was to experience living with other followers of Islam.

The day I took my shahada—statement of faith—in the mosque, I received many tearful congratulations from my new

sisters in Islam. In India and America, though I continued to be plied with warm smiles and bottomless cups of tea from my Muslim cohorts, now that I was Muslim, I was escorted to the ladies' side of the house. Socializing with the multicultural students in my Arabic class—only the female ones, of course!—I found the talk was rarely very profound. The ladies were intelligent, but it seemed there was a line of propriety that wasn't to be crossed, one that meant we could not discuss the meaningful.

Officially becoming Muslim was like sending out an invitation to family members, mosque aunties, and random strangers who saw me in hijab to give me advice. These counselors ranged from those who, judging from the sounds they heard on my side of the bathroom stall, gave me impromptu personal hygiene lessons, to those who admonished me for listening to music, showing my ankle, wearing nail polish, eschewing meat, allowing my son to wear a bracelet, not changing my name to an Arabic one, fasting on a Monday, touching a holy book while menstruating, or being an ally to my LGBTQ brothers and sisters. Let me just say that the list goes on and touches every part of my life and body.

At first, I wasn't too shaken by all of this. Their intentions were good, no doubt, and no one could interfere with the direct connection between me and the Creator, right? But over the years—13 now—Islam came to represent to me more the meddling condescension of people than that sure, true line of communication with God.

Not knowing how love for ourselves or our children or our Creator is supposed to thrive in these circumstances, I began to ask myself whether I was right, so many years before, to fear Islam, not because of its teachings, but because of the narrow definitions of its followers of what constitutes belief and goodness.

I spent some serious time considering these thoughts last year when I was pregnant with my third child. Something about being pregnant—the hormones, the thought of being caretaker and guide to a new human being on this planet, seeing in the mirror the full belly and breasts of a 35,000-year old Venus statue—accentuates life and what is important in it.

My other children instinctively understood the specialness of this. They crowded around my tummy, kissing it and rubbing it and asking about their own time in my body, even saying they remembered some of it.

My baby is now at my breast, on my hip, in my lap—an extension of me until he defines his own place in the world, a process that will take many years.

This is what seems real, this chain of life and death that extends back from my great, great, grandmothers, the inner voice that becomes strongest when I am the active link in that chain, urging me to make the important decisions and sending me magical, meaningful dreams. It is sometimes enough to make me want to give up calling myself a Muslim and just go about enjoying my ever-present relationship with the Creator.

But then I run into wonderful activists like Irshad Manji and Ani Zonneveld, who have revived Islam's tradition of ijtihad; scholars like Amina Wadud and Laury Silvers, who have interpreted Islam through women's perspectives; and a thriving online community of Muslim progressives. Many of these communities are secret, because their members fear what their friends and families would do if they knew their true thoughts. I've even participated in launching a branch of Muslims for Progressive Values in my hometown.

I don't know where Islam and I will stand in the long run, but that connection to God, pumping through my very veins, is a constant for me, and I have faith that the same source that

keeps my heart beating and my lungs working, my breasts producing milk for my baby, and the sun rising and setting will guide me in living in, and contributing to, the world as I'm meant to.

The first surah (passage) of the Quran is called "The Opening." This could imply a mature male energy of a key fitting in a lock, as well as the female aspect of receiving the key and allowing access to the treasures inside. My children have given me the gift of reminding me that I possess both those aspects and that, as a woman, I embody the qualities of trust, opening, and giving. Now it's my sacred obligation to mirror it back to them. This lesson of biology grounds me in the big and small choices I make each day. My body, which society might say is too fat, and the immature male portrayal of Allah says is shameful, is actually the key to the kingdom. For that, I open up in gratitude and let the love pour in.

Who is Maryam and What is Her Story?

Shehnaz Haqqani

WHEN I WAS I WAS A YOUNG CHILD, perhaps of 8 or 9 years of age (possibly younger), I saw Maryam, the Mother of Jesus, in a dream that continues to guide parts of my life today. Before I reflect on this dream here, I want to provide some background of who Maryam is and what her story is as can be gleaned from the Qur'an. This background might help depict the importance of the dream as I understand it.

When Maryam, the mother of Jesus, may God be pleased with them both, was told that she was about to give birth to a son without any male intervention, and she proceeded to childbirth, she uttered some of the most human words ever: "Oh, I wish I had died before this and was in oblivion, forgotten." (Qur'an, 19:23). When I discovered these words in the Qur'an, I felt a moment of peace, relief, and beauty that continues to inspire my sense of faith and devotion to God—and they are an excellent reminder to me of Maryam's humanity, despite the very non-human experiences she had to endure and despite the miraculous nature of her own birth.

The reason that Maryam's words of distress comfort me is that the Qur'an—God, the Ultimate—included them in the Qur'an, and this fact affirms my belief that the Qur'an is absolutely, undeniably divine. Muslims, like other faith groups, tend to reduce God to imperfect, human notions that assume that God does not tolerate complaints addressed to Her (God), that God does not like people who "complain," or, one of my favorites, who are "impatient." *Sabr*, it has to be reminded to people who view God this way, is not the same as "patience," despite popular assumptions. We can be hurting, complaining about that hurt, and still have *sabr* in us. *Sabr* goes beyond patience

and includes the following characteristics, among others: endurance, perseverance, self-restraint, steadfastness. If complaining, and especially complaining to God, displays signs of impatience, then we would have to mis-claim that Maryam was an impatient woman, a woman who had no *sabr*—and this claim is refuted by the Qur'an.

But who is Maryam, and what is her story? In the Qur'an, Maryam's story begins from the time of her conception. Her birth itself was a miracle because her mother is presented to have been barren and passed the age of childbirth. Her mother, whom the Qur'an identifies as "the wife of Imran," appears to have been disappointed after giving birth to a female child, uttering the words: "My Lord, I have delivered a female. [...] And the male is not like the female. I have named her Maryam, and I seek refuge for her in You and for her descendants from Satan, the accursed" (Qur'an, 3:36). This disappointment may be attributed to the mother's sense of an unfulfilled dream that her child be dedicated to the service of God. Since such roles were reserved only for males at the time, her mother did not expect to Maryam to be able, socially or otherwise, to enjoy such a role. But, as the Qur'an notes, God's response to Maryam's mother's dissatisfaction was for to accept her "with good acceptance" and to "cause her to grow in good manner" (Q. 3:37). And so it was that Maryam became the first woman in history to pray in a temple.

Verse 3:37 is a potentially radical (progressive radical, that is) statement: It is a reminder to Maryam's mother—and, by extension, to all of us—that if she thinks Maryam will not fulfil a certain role because of her gender, then make sure her surroundings are such that they will enable her to do so. In other words, we are the bearers of change in our times and societies. In Maryam's case, the Qur'an tells us that she was sent to be raised by Zakariyya, a religious teacher, where she completely submitted herself to God's service. In exchange for her devotion, God blesses her with miraculous provisions of foods outside of their season (e.g., summer foods in winters

and winter foods in summers). This surprises Zakariyya, although he had always known Maryam was a miracle and someone to be emulated, and, when he asks her where she gets her food from, she tells him they are from God (Qur'an, 3:37). Zakariyya, aware that they must be the literal fruits of her commitment to God, is thereby inspired to ask God to bless him with a child of his own who could enjoy the privileged status of Maryam.

It cannot be emphasized enough that Maryam is the only woman named in the Qur'an. Seventy verses make reference to her, 34 of which name her specifically. All other female figures in the Qur'an are identified as wives or daughters of the male figures the Qur'an has already made references to; among them are the wives of Adam, Lot, and Pharaoh. It can be fairly argued that Maryam is not identified without a male reference (as in "Maryam, the Mother of Jesus"), a potential patriarchal reality. However, it can also be pointed out that the "Mother of Jesus" portion of her identity in the Qur'an can be read as a reminder to believers that Jesus is not the son of God but is the son of a human. (Outside of the scope of this piece, the Qur'an vehemently rejects the notion that God has ever given birth to anyone or anything.)

I provide this background merely to emphasize that at virtually every point in her life to which the Qur'an makes a reference, Maryam is experiencing some sort of a miracle. Indeed, many scholars have even argued that Maryam was a prophetess (for more on this, see Hosn Abboud's dissertation, citation below), while others have rejected this claim for what can only be noted as patriarchal attitudes towards women's roles in society. Amina Wadud has also shown that the exemplary women that the Qur'an highlights are also presented as examples to all people of all time, not just to women and not just to the people of their own times and places (for more, see Wadud's *Qur'an and Woman*, ch. 4).

Maryam clearly enjoys a special status in the Qur'an and in religious history more broadly, and her relationship with God—through her miraculous birth, through her devotion to God, through the miraculous birth of her son—make her one of the most important, most revered humans of all time. She is both an ordinary and an extraordinary woman who is always to remain the epitome of piety, the ideal human of all time.

In the dream I had of Maryam, I was wearing a long light-blue skirt and was sitting next to Maryam, who was also wearing a long light-blue skirt. It was the Day of Judgment, and, per descriptions that I read and grew up to of what that day will look like, everything around us was in ruins. We were sitting on a short wall that must have served as the basis of a house or building but had now fallen down—because of Judgment Day. We were swinging our legs. She and I were talking, and, while I don't recall exactly what our conversation was about, I do recall asking her how long she thinks it would take for God to "finish judging everyone." She responded with a simple "I don't know." And then we changed the topic and started talking about something else. It's not clear to me whether we had already been judged and the decision had been issued.

I don't want to share my interpretation of this dream here, and I do not typically look forward to other people's interpretations of the dreams that I have. The reason I tell this dream, however, is that it was the initial moments of my love and respect for Maryam. This dream got me interested in her, her story—and, really, the Qur'an.

Maryam continues to be a major guiding force in my life. She remains the paragon of *sabr*, of endurance, of courage for humans of all time and places, as expressed in the Qur'an.

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The Burden of Eden

Rachael Patterson

THE CONCEPT OF ORIGINAL SIN nearly killed me. This female body I was born in carried within it an incredible weight—the weight of wrongness, of shame and the pain of a nameless wound. The Burden of Eden was quiet, ethereal. As a little girl my father told me how Jesus made him a better daddy, and with the help of Veggie Tales I decided I needed him too.

Obviously, I wasn't enough as I was. Christ was the sacrifice I had been told I needed, and I found joy in my salvation, simultaneously learning the lesson of my need for saving by a masculine lifeline to a masculine god. I learned to quiet my questioning, to accept without wonder, to parrot without analysis. I learned my father was the head of our household, closely followed by my younger brother, and the opinions and feelings of my mother and I were less than nothing—annoyances with no meaning. I found unnamed anger mixed into my shame; I found rebellion mixed with self-destruction was the only way to satisfy the needs I could not name. This dirty body I lived in had no value, no wisdom, no use beyond the sexual satisfaction of the men in my life (as our lovely consumer culture pointed out) and the production of children. With no desire for motherhood, and a need to prove my own worth, I set out upon a campaign to kill off my femininity. I would swear like the men swore, drink like the men drank, fuck like the men fucked. I would objectify and degrade other women, refuse their friendships, and only value them as tools to increase my desirability. I would sell my body with a smile as I felt less and less in control, less and less strong, less and less of a person. I became a wisp of my former self, drowned in whiskey and promiscuity, angrily proclaiming my worth as a masculinized woman! I would be delicate, beautiful, and wasted; a gossamer veil forgotten in the mud. I stumbled about in a haze of intoxicants, allowing nearly every man who wanted

and fiercer than I had ever known. I went deeper and deeper to find her through prayer and worship and ritual. I began to speak and write and found myself on a path I'd never expected. Recovery was tough. Many times, my body broke down, but inside the Goddess was healing every wound that I possessed. The desire and passion in me to be *well* was overwhelming.

Today I am still healing and recovering, but I am the best and strongest version of myself I have ever been. Today I know with all my heart and soul, that the little girl in the woods was right all the time. That little girl has now grown into a powerful, exquisite woman and she and her children have grown strong together. Without the re-emergence of the Divine Feminine in my soul, I would have no life, I would barely exist. Today I thrive and conquer and experience bliss once more.

Inside Allah, The One Divine Mother and The Conscience of Islam

Shahla Khan Salter

"Say: She is Allah, She is One, She is Eternal
She begets not nor is She begotten
And there is none equal unto Her."
–The Holy Quran: Surah Ikhlas (Absoluteness), 112

The above verse defines the Omnipotence of God in Islam.

Emphasizing, as per its title the concept of Absoluteness, the verse lays the framework for "*Tawhid*" or the Oneness of Allah.

It is that Oneness that gives Allah power. It is that Oneness that connects us as a single humanity. It is that Oneness that serves as a reminder that – before God – every individual is simply a speck in a vast and humbling universe.

It puts the enormity of our problems into perspective. It makes us check our ego at the door.

It serves as a reminder that we humans are not that different from one another, having all originated from One God, who resides inside each of us, while remaining in existence far beyond our wildest imagination.

Traditionally acknowledged by all Islamic schools of thought as being beyond gender, Allah is regarded as encompassing both **masculine** and **feminine** characteristics.

Nonetheless, in contradiction of this concept, the vast majority of Muslims now refer to Allah by the masculine pronoun of "He" without reservation and in the Quran the pronoun "She" is never mentioned. Surah Ikhlas is no different.

By altering tradition – and amending the translation from the (now) traditional "He" to "She" – does the collective consciousness of the Ummah shift?

Do we authentically reclaim The Divine Feminine inside Allah that was acknowledged 1400 years ago?

Do we eliminate the neo-patriarchal paradigm that infects the Islam of our "modern" era?

In practice, today calling Allah "She" is considered a subversive and radical act, leaving the most privileged adherents of our faith gasping for breath and madly in search of a patriarchal leg to stand on.

I witnessed the phenomenon unfold for the first time at an interfaith gathering on Feminism and Faith. After I suggested we Muslims may refer to Allah as "She" I heard a frightened, young Muslim man yell, "No!" – interrupting my talk.

It was not a surprise. Before I had begun, he had questioned my legitimacy in speaking at all. Why not? I am a woman, and we are normally silenced in patriarchal religious systems most often by the questioning of our credentials, which are only available to men in the first place.

Now he said – "We must not change the words of the Holy Book! You are changing the Arabic. Do you even know Arabic sister?!"

I smiled.

An elderly woman, a Christian, defended me, "If she wants to call Aaa-llah 'She' – you let her and keep quiet!"

He turned to the other Arab-speaking Muslim in the room, a young PhD student who, unbeknownst to him, had acted as

volunteer imam to lead one of our inclusive, lgbtq-affirming, mixed gender prayers. "Z – you know Arabic – tell her."

The young female imam turned around to face him. Her white hijab encapsulated every strand of her long wavy hair and she said, "I know Arabic and she can call Allah 'She'".

Outnumbered by female dissenters, he retreated. We were not at the traditional mosque but at a party space in a pub in downtown Ottawa.

An older man spoke up. "Well in Hinduism there are many goddesses. Everyone knows they are female. And they scare the crap out of everyone equally. This is not a problem." Everyone laughed.

While the young Muslim man that day was correct when he said that the Quran exclusively contains the pronoun "He" in referring to Allah, it is also held by some Islamic scholars that this was not the case originally.

Fortunately, what the Quran has not lost in HIStory is the key to an all-gendered Allah, which lies in Her/His 99 names. These names, in the original Arabic, vary by gender.

Most significant in this regard is Allah as *Al Dhaat*, or The Essence. The Essence composes Allah. And The Essence is Feminine.

And this is not a new notion. In fact, it was the great 12th century Islamic philosopher, Ibn al- 'Arabi, who said, *"I sometimes employ the feminine pronoun in addressing Allah, keeping in view The Essence, Al Dhaat."*

Also important are the two most highly prominent names of the 99 names of Allah. They are *Al Rahman* and *Al Raheem* and they refer to God as *The Merciful* and *The Compassionate*.

They are mentioned often – at the start of virtually each Surah or chapter of the Quran. They are also recited at the commencement of every daily prayer.

Where, when, and the frequency at which they arise shows evidence of the preamble we must follow in interpreting the scripture and perhaps the qualities we must remember when we think of God. The qualities – Mercy and Compassion – form the lens from which the rest of the scripture must be read, and our intentions must be formed. They are the conscience of the Quran and inhabit the mosques that reside in all of our hearts. And the repeated remembrance that Allah is The Merciful and The Compassionate leaves us to self-reflect as an Ummah on the most critical question of our era: Does The Merciful and The Compassionate, Allah, actually order the prescriptions for humanity that the cruel clerics of our day now demand?

Groundbreaking is that Al Rahman and Al Raheem directly emanate from The Divine Feminine.

Why?

Because, it is from the root of these words, Al Rahman and Al Rahim, that we discover a direct correlation to The Divine Feminine specifically from the word, "*rhm*" which means the "womb."

The connection correlates what is uniquely feminine – the womb – to The Divine Feminine.

It follows that the conscience of the Quran, Mercy and Compassion, illustrate Allah as The Divine Mother.

The imagery is profound considering that returning to the womb is humanity's most common dream.

It is from inside Allah The Goddess – *Al-Dhaat, Al Rahman, Al Raheem* – that The Patriarchal Allah of the clerics (who supposedly demand blood atonement and war) are relegated to myth.

Allah, The Divine Mother, bears the universe and all of humanity. Her most profound role reminds us of Her ultimate safety and unconditional, infinite love.

After all, no Muslim forgets the sanctity that embodies the verse of the Quran we turn to traditionally during trials and tribulation: *"from Allah we come, to Allah we return."*

What do we need more of in our era?

From Her we come. To Her we return.

Inshallah.

to take back our own listening, to use our own voice, to see our own light."

The Divine Feminine is the home I had never found in my faith as it had been taught and told to me. The Divine Feminine is the God the Mother that had been withheld from me. The Divine Feminine both illumined the words of Christ for me and also obviated the terror of not belonging that I realized I had felt throughout my life prior to dis-covering Her. The Divine Feminine allowed me to take back my self—my very soul—and hear my own voice, unsilenced by the drone of a male-centered theology in which there was no place for me.

Abolitionist, suffragist, and freed slave Sojourner Truth wrote, "Religion without humanity is a poor human stuff."

As her name implies, Truth was right: humanity is the essence of what religion must be. As St. Hildegard wrote, "Dare to declare who you are. It is not far from the shores of silence to the boundaries of speech. The path is not long, but the way is deep. You must not only walk there, you must be prepared to leap."

The way for me was indeed deep—but the humanity I sought was there. When I leapt into the embrace of God the Mother, of the Sacred Feminine, I found myself in the truest possible sense. And for the first time, was able to see God from within as well as without.

Fatima as Divine Creator, Wisdom and Light

Noor-un-nisa Gretasdottir

SHE EXISTS IN THE VISIONS OF SAINTS, the hadith of the Prophet Muhammad and throughout the Bible. She existed before anything else, and She helped create the world. The God of the Bible tells us so. I recently found the quote below by Hildegard Von Bingen speaking of the Divine Feminine and it reminds me of everything I have learned about the Feminine Divine in the past couple years in relation to Sophia and Fatima Fatir (Fatima the Creator).

> *I am the Supreme and Fiery Force who kindles every living spark... As I circled the whirling sphere with my upper wings (that is, with Wisdom), rightly I ordained it. And I am the fiery life of the Divine essence: I flame above the beauty of the fields; I shine in the waters; I burn in the sun, the moon, and the stars. And, with the airy wind, I quicken all things vitally by an unseen, all-sustaining life. For the air is alive in the verdure and the flowers; the waters flow as if they lived; the sun too lives in its light; and when the moon wanes it is rekindled by the light of the sun, as if it lived anew. Even the stars glisten in their light as if alive.*
> The Holy Spirit as Caritas (Grace/World Soul)
> St. Hildegard von Bingen. trans. B. Newman (mod.)

Wisdom is known by many names and the Feminine Divine is often associated with Light. Wisdom is referred to as Sophia in the Greek language. Sophia is now understood as Feminine Wisdom. Sophia speaks in the Bible and apocrypha in beautiful ways.

> *Listen! Wisdom is calling out. Reason is making herself heard. On the hilltops near the road and at*

the crossroads she stands. At the entrance to the city, beside the gates, she calls: "I appeal to all of you; I call to everyone on earth."
–Proverbs 8:1-4

This Lady of Light and Wisdom is not limited to the Bible. She is truly universal. Zoroastrians refer to God as Ahura Mazda. Mazda also means Wisdom and is considered feminine. To the Egyptians, she was Isis. So honored was Isis that the Pharaoh could not be King without her. The throne of the king was Goddess Aset, the name of Isis in Ancient Egyptian. Aset means throne and the Goddess in hieroglyphs had a throne on top of her head. Sophia and Isis are often connected by those who worship the Goddess. Sophia also had her important role with the kings.

Sophia says in the Bible:

I help kings to govern
and rulers to make good laws.
Every ruler on earth governs with my help,
officials and nobles alike.
–Proverbs 8:15-16

Whether it is Isis who is creating a king by her throne or Sophia's wisdom helping to govern them, we are speaking of common aspects of the Feminine here. Does this mean there are two deities? That's up to you. Personally, I don't see it that way because I believe Supreme Reality is able to contain all She contains beyond our limited perspectives. Does the Feminine Divine give God a gender? I see that there is the female body and the Sacred Feminine. I think everything in the Universe has a radiance and capability for wisdom that is Feminine. Intellect and Wisdom are the yin and yang to me. Do I believe in the Divine Mother? Yes.

The Beloved reminds us of her every time we experience the miracle of a new life. If women had gathered the books of the Bible instead of men, I think we would see more reverence for the wombs. If women ruled, we would respect and honor the life force in all creation. At least I hope we would. Thank Sophia that she has survived in such powerful verses in the Bible because they will help us restore her to her proper place. If women had collected the books of the Bible, there wouldn't be harsh and uncooperative rejections to everything feminine inside and outside the religions.

Yet she is so easy to find. And so difficult to stop believing in once you know her. It's impossible not to love her because she loves us so much.

> *Go looking for her, and she will reveal herself to you. Take hold of her and don't let go.* (Sirach 6:27)

She shows up in the least expected places also. As a Sufi, I would never have thought of finding her here. In Arabic, a reference to wisdom as "hikmat" is feminine. So, there are ways of knowing Divine Wisdom as a Feminine Quality. Yet through the hadith, explanations of various parts of Quran and Shia titles given to Fatima, it leaves me in awe that Fatima held a miraculous secret. One title given to Fatima by Shi'ites is "Mother of the Book." The usual meaning for this term is source of the Qur'an. Even Muhammed referred to Fatima as "Mother of her father."

So how old is Fatima then? Older than earth itself! Both Sophia (Wisdom) and Fatimah existed before all else but God:

> *The Prophet Muhammad said: "Fatima is a heavenly being in the body of a human and God created her*

before the creation of Adam, the Universe, and the other human souls... from his luminous light."

The Bible says about Sophia/Wisdom:

> *Wisdom was created before anything else;* (Sirach 1:4a)
>
> *The Creator created me first of all, the first of Its works, long ago. I was made in the very beginning, at the first, before the world began. I was born before the oceans when there were no springs of water. I was born before the mountains, before the hills were set in place, before God made the earth and its fields or even the first handful of soil.* (Proverbs 8:22-26)

It's also interesting that St. Hildegard's vision is about light, something that Muslims find special about Fatima.

Fatimah is often called al-Zahra (the-Radiant or Venus Star) by devout Muslims. It is said that at night when the women darned their clothes, they used the light radiating from Fatima to see. Her light is said to have been that bright. She was also called Nooriya which means The Light and Durra-an-Noor (the Path of Light).

Her Light is Divine and grants her special powers.

> *Allah spoke to Gabriel saying: "take some of the light of Fatimah and put it in a lamp and hang it above the throne". Gabriel did so and the seven skies and seven earths flourished and the angels of the skies prayed and prostrated. Allah then said, "I swear by my might, pride, honour, glory, and elevated position, I will maintain the blessings of your glorification and*

reverence of Fatimah, her husband, and her children and those whom love her until the Day of Judgment, and for that she was called "Alzahraa' (The Resplendent)."

Hadith about Fatima tell us she was also a Creator! She has even been called Fatima Fatir which means Fatima the Creator.

In the first creation story in Genesis 1, there is clear evidence about the existence of the Divine Mother, who was Wisdom and All-Love. She co-created and women were created as equals in the first story.

> *Then God said, "And now we will make human beings; they will be like us and resemble us. They will have power over the fish, the birds, and all animals, domestic and wild, [d] large and small." So, God created human beings, making them to be like himself. He created them male and female, blessed them, and said, "Have many children, so that your descendants will live all over the earth and bring it under their control. I am putting you in charge of the fish, the birds, and all the wild animals.* (Genesis 1:26-28)

However, you can see in Genesis 1:27 the default patriarchal pronoun which would destroy women's lives for thousands of years. The Mother was there at the beginning of the story. There are some who say that before patriarchy existed, a matriarchal culture existed, one of peace where love flowed freely and war didn't exist. Perhaps that was the period of Genesis 1:26. Yet it gives me hope. If it existed once. It can exist again. It is possible, but we have to make it happen and we have to make the Mother Goddess the center of our dream.

There are some who will call me insane or even blasphemous for writing such things, but my faith is by the Light.

> *Sayyidi Alahazrat said, "'Noor bint e noor zawj e noor umm e noor o noor'"*
>
> *'Light is She, the daughter of light, the wife of light, the mother of light and light'*

Another hadith is shocking because Allah says: "Oh Ahmad (Prophet Muhammad)! If it wasn't for you, I would not have created the Universe, and if it wasn't for Ali, I would not have created you, and if it wasn't for Fatimah, I would not have created either of you."

Rumi speaks of all women as a Light when he says:

> *Woman is a beam of the divine Light.*
> *She is not the being whom sensual desire*
> *takes as its object.*
> *She is Creator, it should be said.*
> *She is not a Creature.*

Is Rumi speaking of that beautiful starry night that is the mystery of Fatima/Sophia/Wisdom?

For those who have read all the verses in the Bible on Sophia, God clearly is referring to the Feminine Sophia, who has existed with God eternally. If we look at the hadith of Fatimah, it is impossible not to consider that there is a secret behind her. We are told in the hadith that She is made of God's Luminous Light. She is the Nur of God.

If we had a world that was matriarchal—and a Bible of books collected by Wisdom's women instead of minds conditioned by patriarchy—would the Feminine Divine seem so absurd?

If we truly absorbed what it means that Islam's Prophet would not have existed if it weren't for Fatima, could we easier allow the Divine Feminine to be welcomed?

In Arabic ayat means several things. The verses of the Quran are referred to as ayat, but the word also means signs. Truly, wherever we look are ayat and we must find her for Wisdom is precious.

Amin.

humanity. The creation myths are symbolic narratives depicting for us the trauma of birth and the hope of one day returning to that state of preconscious perfection. When the Mother's heartbeat was our own. When we were nourished directly from her body, and when the darkness we knew was not filled with fear and isolation, but with unbroken intimacy and visceral, relational truth. After centuries of declaring and fighting for our independence, according to filmmaker Tiffany Shlain in her documentary "Connected," it may be time for us to declare our interdependence instead. Let us redeem the stain on humanity left by the masculinized version of Columbia's name. If we do, it is possible to overturn the institutionalized systems of ignorance, oppression, and greed that Columbus brought this Virgin land and reclaim our original inheritance as brothers and sisters with all that is, and all that is possible for us to become.

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Fasting from Patriarchy: Interfaith Ramadan from a Struggling Muslim-Feminist Perspective

Trista Hendren

I have a weird relationship with Allah.

Although I don't usually fast, Ramadan is the time that I extensively contemplate my relationship to Her and to humanity as a whole. Yesterday it hit me that perhaps I am really not a Muslim anymore.

When I left Christianity more than 20 years ago, it wasn't exactly a clean break. It took me years to separate myself from the guilt and worry of going to hell for every small infraction. I had been indoctrinated from birth with fear in the conservative congregations I attended. After a few years of being an atheist, I discovered Islam and feminism; both were revolutionary for me.

I thought about the Pillars of Islam yesterday and finally acknowledged some hard truths to myself. I no longer fast, I no longer pray in the traditional sense, and going to Mecca is something I no longer desire to do. Being an impoverished single mother for several years also meant that Zakat[161] was something I was not in a position to even consider.

However, I still feel a connection to Islam where it feels absolutely wrong and strange to say that I am no longer Muslim.

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[161] Mandatory charitable contribution based on net worth.

Is Allah merciful and compassionate enough to accept me as I am? *I think so.*

I believe we should show ourselves the same grace in our Interfaith work that we give to others. We are all, still, a work in progress. Audre Lorde wrote, "Only by learning to live in harmony with your contradictions can you keep it all afloat."

I find that the longer I live, the messier things become and the less able I am to fit myself neatly within one small box.

Ramadan, to me, is the ultimate act of humility and interfaith *connectedness*. It is a reminder of our *commonness*, our *unimportantness* as individuals—while uplifting and celebrating the joy of community. And when I say "unimportant", I mean in an ego sense. We are all, of course, important as individuals and divine beings. In the Western world however, I fear that the ego has taken over in a way that has crushed all sense of community.

There is still a part of me that still thinks I am a horrible and selfish person for not fasting. I have written and erased my reasons here in this essay a dozen times, but ultimately have decided not to share them.

These feelings of inadequacy that we hold against ourselves keep us from speaking up in other areas. When we feel we are not a "good enough" Muslim, we tend not to use our voice.

I cannot speak from a Muslim perspective anymore as someone who has been deeply influenced by Islam. Progressive Islam, like Progressive Christianity, still has not come far enough for me to consider actively practicing again. I do not want to pray in a small back room

somewhere. I do not want to be relegated to second class. I do not want to explain to my (progressive) brothers again and again why I need them to be more vocal about their feminism or about the divine feminine within Islam.

I am encouraged to see the woman-only spaces popping up and *love* getting invited to services elsewhere that are inclusive, but my reality is that there is no such space nearby and what I really crave from my faith is community. My ideas are too "out there" for most Muslims I have met locally, as much as I may love them as people. I've learned to keep my mouth shut during community events, turning inward for my spiritual needs.

These last years, I have been searching for the feminine face of Allah within what most people consider the overwhelming patriarchy of Islam. *Will I find Her?* I deeply believe so, despite the many people within and outside of Islam who think me silly or wrong.

I am exhausted by the never-ending task of explaining to Muslim brothers why feminism is still so important to me, and explaining to feminist sisters why I am still a Muslim. I often feel I am being made to choose between feminism and Islam. When I converted after studying Islam for several years, it seemed that feminism and Islam matched up pretty well. After 20 years of seeing how Islam is often *practiced*, I am not so certain anymore.

It seems this year has become a fast from patriarchy. My tolerance of it has shrunk to zilch. I would rather be holed up in a dark room reading women's voices than surrounded by people who I cannot express my full range of ideas around. Perhaps these lonely years are mine to claim as I reconsider what it means to be a Radical Feminist Muslim.

Like most women, I still do not have a room of my own. My husband wakes up each morning with one thing on his mind (sex). I wake up with 82. (Sex is on there, *somewhere*.) When I mentioned this to him, he joked that he thinks I actually have 83 things on my mind. Considering that I am married to the most progressive man I have ever met, this troubles me deeply. Despite what I would consider the equality in our relationship, I am still much more burdened, at least psychologically, by the unspoken demands of being female.

Life as a woman may always be a messy interruption of sorts. I may never be able to write as much as I want to because writing even a *single* essay often takes me weeks. How can women even begin to contemplate our place within our faith traditions when we are always care-giving and catering to the opinions of men? Will women as a whole *ever* have a solid role in any faith tradition if we continue on this way?

Participating in Interfaith Ramadan[162] caused me to search my soul this year and contemplate what I need to change within myself and what I want to focus on changing in the world at large. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) continues to challenge me daily with these words: "If you see something wrong, you should correct it with your hand

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[162] The annual Interfaith Ramadan blog series provides an inclusive platform where people from around the world, of all faiths and none, share their experiences and offer their perspectives on interfaith issues. The series seeks to include a range of faith traditions, including groups often marginalised, overlooked, or ignored by society, the media, and perhaps even the interfaith community itself. Alongside a diversity of faiths and beliefs comes a broader range of topics, including LGBT advocacy in faith communities, efforts to empower minorities and women, and critiques of religious journalism and interfaith practises. http://www.interfaithramadan.com

and if you are unable to, then speak out against it and if you cannot do that, then feel that it is wrong in your heart."

For a long time, there have been aspects of how Islam is currently being practiced that I have held quietly as wrong in my heart. This last week of Ramadan I will begin to decide what areas I am finally willing to act upon.

It was the social justice aspect of Islam that most attracted me to this religion. Some days I feel like I don't see enough of that, and other days I remind myself that I have not gone far enough with that myself. What I'd like to see from everyone at Ramadan is a radical re-making of the entire world.

*Adapted from an essay published on *Interfaith Ramadan*, July 2015.

CONCLUSION

This book is just one beginning to a conversation
we hope that will spread around the globe.
We sincerely hope that each reader will take a
look at the list of books that follows
and read prolifically.

... to be continued ...

Suggested Reading

A Daughter of Isis: The Autobiography of Nawal El Saadawi – Nawal El Saadawi and Sherif Hetata

A History of God – Karen Armstrong

A Jihad for Justice: Honoring the Work and Life of Amina Wadud – Edited by Kecia Ali, Juliane Hammer and Laury Silvers

A Serpentine Path: Mysteries of the Goddess – Carol P. Christ

Believing Women in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur'an – Asma Barlas

Beyond Duality: The Art of Transcendence – Laurence Galian

Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation – Mary Daly

Breaking up with God – Sarah Sentilles
Buffalo Woman Comes Singing – Brooke Medicine Eagle

Feminism Without Borders, Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity – Chandra Talpade Mohanty

Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center – bell hooks

Foremothers of the Women's Spirituality Movement: Elders and Visionaries – Edited by Miriam Robbins Dexter and Vicki Noble

God Dies by the Nile and Other Novels – Nawal El Saadawi

God is Not Alone: Our Mother – The Holy Spirit – Marianne Widmalm

Goddesses and the Divine Feminine: A Western Religious History – Rosemary Ruether

Goddess Calling, Inspirational Messages and Meditations of Sacred Feminine Liberation Thealogy – Rev. Dr. Karen Tate

Goddesses, Goddesses – Janine Canan

Goddess and God in the World: Conversations in Embodied Theology – Carol P. Christ and Judith Plaskow

Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism – Mary Daly

Headscarves and Hymens: Why the Middle East Needs a Sexual Revolution – Mona Eltahawy

Heretics: A Love Story – Mary Saracino

holy cards: dead women talking – Penny-Anne Beaudoin

Holy Women Icons – Angela Yarber

In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose – Alice Walker

Inside the Gender Jihad – Dr. Amina Wadud

Longing for Darkness – China Galland

Memoirs from the Women's Prison – Nawal El Saadawi

Missing Mary – Charlene Spretnak

Nine Parts of Desire: The Hidden World of Islamic Women – Geraldine Brooks

PaGaian Cosmology: Re-inventing Earth-based Goddess Religion – Glenys Livingstone

Progressive Muslims: On justice, Gender and Pluralism – Edited by Omid Safi

Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective – Dr. Amina Wadud

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